

Acts Series Part 35

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[0 : 00] Please turn this evening to a reading from the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 18. Look at the words there in verse 24 onwards, Paulus.

We have here, I'd like to suggest to you, a model of what we are meant to be about as a church. We are here to see people change.

It is our act of worship to God to evangelize the nations and disciple the nations in Christ.

And we are to see people come through a transformation of their understanding of God, the way they look at the world, even the way they look at themselves. And when we bring people in and we build them up, we then send them out to bring that message to others.

Some have said that the process of evangelism is never complete until the evangelized become evangelists. And though there is a specific calling, that some people are exceptionally gifted by God at communicating their faith to other people, the reality is also that every single Christian has a command laid upon their hearts to be ready to give a reason for the hope that is within them.

[1 : 34] And we have an example of how God can do that here in Apollos. And I want to look at his life with you tonight as the kind of, if you like, the masterpiece, that the great artist of heaven, God himself, wants to paint in people's lives, in our lives, and the lives of the lives of the people that he can send into your fellowship, your family of faith, the church here in Bonacord.

He wants the church to be about this task. It's not just about numbers in the church, your power, or just remaining faithful to the gospel, but we are to see the church like an artist's studio.

And we're to participate as assistants to the great master craftsman, the great master painter himself, as he paints with the colors of the gospel into people's lives.

And what you have here at the end of Acts 18 is one particular masterpiece that God's Spirit was painting, creating in these days.

It's the portrait of a man. It's the figure of a man. And it has great balance in its proportions, as we'll see.

[3 : 05] But yet this masterpiece needed the assistance of God's, assistance, should I say, in Priscilla and Aquila, to just do some touch-up work on this painting.

A few things that had to be done before the painting, as it were, was ready to go on in its next stage, its next journey. So I want to look at this portrait that we have of Apollos and see what we can learn from it.

The first thing I want to notice with you is the balance that should be in the life of a believer, as illustrated in this portrait we have before us of Apollos, and then the areas of touch-up that were required in this painting.

Now, balance in a believer. God is looking for believers who have a balance in their outlook, a balance in their mind, as well as a balance in their heart.

What we're given of the details of Apollos there in verse 24, a Jew, native of Alexandria, coming to Ephesus, learned man, thorough knowledge of the Scriptures, very capable in speaking.

[4 : 38] It gives us something of his background. He was a learned man. He came from Alexandria, I think perhaps maybe the second city of the ancient Roman Empire.

It was famous as a great seat of learning, great university there, and a huge Jewish population, maybe two out of the five districts of the city, had large Jewish communities.

And the likelihood is that he was a man who would have studied the philosophies of the day, and yet because of his Jewish background, he was also extremely knowledgeable, as it says here in the Scriptures, to ask the Old Testament.

And I think that in itself is such an attractive picture to us of harmony and of the balance that makes for successful, fruitful, useful followers of Jesus today, that we need that kind of balance as well.

How often do we see that today? Where people know the world, in the sense they understand the philosophies, the way things tick, the views, the worldviews as we call it, of people around us, and yet equally have a deep grounding in the Scriptures.

[6 : 09] I think it was Spurgeon that said that this was required of all preachers, that they would be able to, as it were, preach with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other. So that there could be that fusion, a bridge through the preaching and the ministry of God's Word between the people and the world, and getting them to connect to the living God.

That is a balance that is still required today in the church. That is God's objective for your life. We need it.

We need people like that. But it's a balance that's very hard to find. Doesn't the church usually, as human nature is, want to go from one extreme to another?

And often we can find that fine line that we're meant to walk very hard to discover. So we go from churches that virtually sell out to the popular culture around them, and are so blended with it. There is no discernible difference to others that want to hide away in a holy huddle, so remote and so utterly separate. And there's such a strong disconnect between the church culture and the surrounding culture that nobody literally bridges over it.

[7 : 32] And the church slowly, as it circles its wagons, just dies off in its little enclave. And Scotland is a witness to that.

It's a land filled with the tombstones of so many churches that have circled the wagons and have died. And yet it is also witness to so many other churches that have sold out and compromised. Liberalism on one hand, legalism on another. Can we find balance? This is what's being exemplified, I think, here, in the kind of character that God could use in Apollos, a man with such understanding, such education, and yet such a knowledge of the Scriptures, that with a bit of touch-up, as we'll see, made him all the more effective in serving God.

Well, this is true of churches today. Can we find that balance today? Because it's needed. Some in the churches will know their Bibles. How many of that is true of people today?

I'm not so sure how many of you really do read your Bibles regularly and seek to understand it. I hope you do. But I think sometimes in the church leadership, we're guilty of assuming too much on that line.

[8 : 52] We need to be deep in the Word. And yet how many intellectuals are there about today? In your universities and in government agencies, etc., who have any knowledge of the Bible in any meaningful way.

Not many. But society will be transformed when you get a fusion of the two. And that means, I think, for some of the younger folks here, that it will be God's desire and will for some of you to take your Christian faith and go right to the very top of your career, business, public, private, whatever it is. But we need Christians who will go into these areas without compromising their commitment to Jesus Christ.

And yet, through a warmth and attractiveness in their faith, and being switched on to their work, are able to rise to the very top.

You have perhaps a supreme example of that in Daniel, in his own life in Babylon, there in a multicultural, multi-religious society, as a strange creature believing in the one true God, and yet he reached the very top politically of that society.

[10 : 20] We have one young guy in our congregation who is an SNP fanatic, and he's just, you know, not advertising for any party, just stating the fact that he is. And you can just see him, future first minister of Scotland.

If he can do that fused with a living and vital faith in Jesus Christ, will that be a bad thing? Will it be a bad thing for some of you here to rise up through the ranks of your corporation and your business and exemplify Christ at the very top and have that influence of bringing kingdom characteristics to filter all the way down in an organization?

Well, that will come if there is a balance in the church and in a Christian's life, the culture of the Bible and the church of God, the culture of the world around. There's a balance here between also the Word and the Spirit.

You get that in verse 25. It tells us that he spoke with real fervor, something that's perhaps not really encouraged very often today to show too much emotion.

Every culture has its acceptable levels. Too much can be distracting as well. Paul has seemed to have combined real fire with light, the passion of his heart with the understanding of his mind.

[11 : 51] And what he did know of Jesus, he taught that much with accuracy and with passion. I think there there's a lesson to the churches as well.

That is the kind of balance that we need in our own portrait. But how often do we see that? Very often, churches today will either focus on good theology and turn out to be rather often spiritually arid, repressing emotions in public worship, and very quiet on evangelism.

We all know churches like that. Some of you have tried to escape from churches like that in your upbringing. That means that the truth has just been locked up in the head.

It's not trickling down into the heart. Truth should move us. Other churches might be all emotion, very little of substance.

But we need a balance between the head and the heart, the mind, the word, and the spirit. Truth should move us.

[13 : 04] If we are really doing our theology well, then it should move us to the heights of doxology, of praising God.

So, though we can be quite well known as Reformed churches for knowing our theology doesn't lead to real outpouring of praise.

One questions, has it done what it's meant to be doing? There's a need for balance there that's often lacking in the picture of contemporary Christianity as well.

We have to do our theology, do it well, and we have got our hearts that are burning in response to that theology.

So, a balance here in Apollos, in his outlook, in the mind, and also in his heart, his spirit, his fervent of heart as well, great in mind.

[14 : 08] But I want to focus tonight as well on the areas of touch-up that had to be done on this portrait that we have here.

Because it is fascinating how he comes into the story and how Priscilla and Aquila hear him speaking so eloquently, so powerfully, but realize something, something was just missing.

So, I think what you see here is, first of all, what was missing? Let's have a look at that. It tells us that he knew, verse 25, the way of the Lord.

And he did teach with accuracy regarding Jesus, at least what he knew about Jesus. But it says that he really knew only the baptism of John, John, John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus.

So, there was a few things he still needed to hear about. Probably, he'd heard about the preaching of repentance, that means doing a U-turn, turning away from living life your way and living God's way, that John preached.

[15 : 29] Probably heard that Jesus was the coming Messiah, but he obviously missed something, and it was obvious in his preaching in the synagogue.

And given what you have in chapter 19, a very similar situation, where you have a group of disciples, followers, that Paul comes across in Ephesus, also had been exposed to the baptism and teaching of John, something was missing.

This time, it's spelt out a little bit more, and it's probably also what Apollos was missing. And you've got it down there in verse 6, where it says, Paul placed their hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them.

That the baptism of the Holy Spirit was perhaps what was missing also in Apollos. He knew very little, perhaps, of the crucifixion of Jesus as an atonement or sin of the resurrection.

Maybe he didn't know much about that or anything about it. And then the ascension of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It's speculative, we're not sure, but given the context, that would seem to be a fair guess.

[16 : 52] Point being, though, here is somebody who has switched on, but there's still a little touch-up work that needed to be done in his life.

And that goes for many Christians and many churches. They likewise have areas that they need to learn in.

Think a little bit of that in a moment, perhaps. But what you've also got is not just what had to be taught, but you've got an example here of the teachers. Priscilla and Aquila, and they're a very attractive couple in what we read about them.

They take the time to do a one-on-one with Apollos. They show to us the value of the one.

that sometimes in a congregation like this, so many people coming and going, it's very easy to miss the one. And it's that one person who may turn out to be the Apollos.

[18:00] Could be the one that's always hiding at the back, always shooting out the door before anybody can shake their hand and catch them for a conversation. But how many could be like that?

Who in God's hands could be used to do great things? Now, Aquila and Priscilla were the kind of people to spot that.

They were also willing to try and explain to this educated intellectual from Alexandria. They were willing to take time out to explain things.

They did not back off saying, well, who are we? We've never been to university. We don't have that kind of education. What do we, you know, compare to that person?

You ever think like that? You think like that? Then you limit what God can do through you. Because what is the greatest thing to know? As we sang in the psalm, makes us wiser than our teachers, wiser than all the university lecturers together.

[19:05] in this city. So, you know the way of God. And that is not something that you just find through the general knowledge of God in this universe.

It's found through the special revelation that comes in the Word that we've got now written in this book. And for a church to catch characters like Apollos in its net, to land a big fish like that, it takes some workers like Priscilla and Aquila.

That courage, that sharpness of mind to see what's needed, that willingness to go out of their way, to speak to someone, to explain things better to them, and show them a more adequate and more adequate understanding of things.

And that's what they do, and they open their home to Apollos. They took him in, and he was taught there. Do you really think there isn't something there of a message from God tonight to some of you in Bonacord?

The opportunities you have in this city are phenomenal. The young lives and the minds that you can reach is incredible.

[20:33] The people that, in God's providence, he has ready to send into your midst. You have no idea. But he'll only do it if there are Priscilla's and Aquila's with open hearts, open homes, with open diaries to make the time to meet characters like an Apollos or anyone else to show them a way to go.

Now, that's for the teachers, but then there's those who have to be taught, the pupils. And Apollos exemplifies a great characteristic here, why he's willing to learn from these people who, I guess, may well have been lower on the social scale and the intellectual scale to what he was.

One of them was a woman. Men in those days weren't exactly noted for learning from women. But Apollos shows here an incredible humility.

And if I can leave that one word to the younger people here tonight, what will see you grow and what will make you useful to God that He may give you a bright future in His kingdom, it will be this word, humility, a willingness to learn from others.

That's not always easy for the younger generation, is it? Some of the teenagers here, you must despair at the inability of your parents to work a DVD or understand modern technology.

[22:24] and you know that if you were to leave them to record your favorite program as you were going out, there is not a chance that they would be able to do it.

But ask yourself, isn't it just possible that your old mom and your old dad might know a few tricks about life that you don't? You need humility to be able to learn in a situation like that.

You feel for a younger generation and that there is, in particular, the internet generation, the temptations to think you got it all fast because you literally have a world of knowledge at your fingertips.

But what is missing in the quantity of information available, what is missing is how to sift it, how to fit it together.

Endless pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, but how do you put it together? That takes wisdom, wisdom takes humility to learn from others.

[23:35] Like a thousand seedling plants ready to sprout, but no trellis, no framework to grow up, to put all that knowledge together. together. And so some of you may even now be looking down on your parents and your upbringing in the church thinking, well, as soon as I get the opportunity, I'm out of this place you won't see me for dust.

You're in danger of missing out in greatness because the greatest life you could live is when you live submitted to God and He does not make mistakes.

He has got plans for your life that are much better than your own plan. Much better. Can you believe that tonight?

Paul stood. He was willing to be taught. Clearly, more talented than the Priscilla's and the Quillus, but he went with them. He learned from these people.

Well, probably even a lesson for our society there that looks down on the church more and more today, despising what it believes, incredulous that wisdom could be deposited in Christianity.

[24 : 52] Isn't it a joke? But it's from the despised and the apparently insignificant that we can learn some of life's most important truths.

The will people today. So, there's what had to be taught, the teachers, there's the pupils. And if one could apply this to churches like the Free Church, which has the label Reform, it means it's really got the most incredible, rich understanding of how to fit the Word, God, and Christianity, how to fit it theologically all together.

Who's going to listen to our teaching? I think we're a little bit like the Priscilla and Aquila and there's churches out there that are bigger, stronger, growing.

They listen to what we've got. They don't have some of the riches that we've got, that there's a deficiency in their understanding. There's still a touch-up job and the masterpiece that God is requiring.

Well, that's true of many churches. Our theological heritage today in the Free Church is an incredibly rare commodity in the wider Christian church.

[26 : 30] Somebody described it recently as the world's best-kept secret. And when you are exposed to the wider church, some of us have been here, particularly in South America, when I've been over there, you see the great need for what we've got at one level.

They don't need our dying churches. They don't need prejudive evangelism. They do need our theological resources and understanding and passion for the glory of God.

But the only time I think we'll see the wider Christian church listening to what we have got, if we do what we do better.

Someone put it in terms like this. If we reformed churches can do our evangelism better than the Armenians, the Baptists, the Pentecostals, whatever, we can do our evangelism better than them. And if we can do our mercy ministries, social side to our Christianity, meeting poor people in the streets and all the rest of it, we can do that better than the liberal churches.

[27 : 50] which that's all that they're about, then people will listen. If the free church can exemplify how to do evangelism, if it can show that Calvinism is not a handicap, but it is the most incredible help to planting churches, reaching unchurched people, extending the kingdom, them.

Then our Pentecostal brothers, Baptist brethren and all the rest, and then we begin to listen. But who could blame them for not listening to us today? And the liberal church is the same, that know that the justice of God is important, that it's written across the pages of the Scriptures and the prophets, and know that it's a joke to talk about loving God when we don't love our fellow man in practical ways.

Are they ever going to reconsider their views in Scripture again when they see a cold Calvinism that can walk past the beggar in the street with their heads filled with knowledge and their hands in their pockets?

I don't think so. So there is a parallel here, I think, a lesson to extrapolate that if we are to have that position of serving the wider church, of daring to presume that there is some touch-up work in the wider portrait of the Christian church, then the only time it's really going to happen, the only way we can facilitate the Apollos out there to listen to us, is when we do our evangelism better and our mercy ministry better than anyone else, then they might stop and have the humility to listen to the glorious teachings that we have, the way of understanding, the whole structure of the Christian faith.

God, so there's things to be touched up, that have teachers, that have humble pupils, but this story ends as the story often ends for many of you here in Bonacord, when this beautiful portrait has been done with its balance, the touch-up work is complete, and the finished painting is there, is it going to be just hung up on the wall in this church?

[30 : 35] Tells us that Paulus went on to Achaia and served greatly the wider church there, vigorously refuting the Jews in public debate.

My friends, this is God's calling for Bonacord tonight. This is God's will that you expend yourself and give yourself to raising up other people and then sending them out, and never maybe directly benefiting from their gifts and their presence with you, but you send them out.

And that's what this church had, the wisdom and the humility to do the Paulus, and he did a great job, refuting the Jews in public debate, proving from the Scriptures.

He made a great apologist, what we mean by that, someone who defends the faith. It was like a snowplow just clearing out all the arguments and misconceptions people had, leaving a clear road for the gospel.

That's what an apologist does. So the painting was complete, but it was packaged up and it was sent out somewhere else for others to enjoy and receive the benefit.

[31 : 57] Well, well, God will give us in our churches some people to keep, but others to prepare to mission. You get the young folks that the Highland Church has sent down so often to the cities, but then in turn you often see the students moving on.

But there is a great calling in that for Priscilla's and Aquila's today in this congregation to do just exactly that thing, because behind it all God has great purposes to build and extend his kingdom in great ways.

Good theology should travel well. So what will the portraits look like that this congregation here sends out into the wider world?

There are cities and churches in Scotland and across the globe. How many of the younger folk here will go into full-time ministry, or is that just not even on the cards in your thinking?

Be humble and listen to the Spirit that speaks to your heart tonight. Send them out and rejoice in the work, strengthen the wider church.

[33 : 18] You have in Bonacord the most incredible ministry. It's your calling. We need the Priscilla's and Aquila's, and then we'll catch the Apollosus, send them out.

Do it. Who knows? Fruit that may come from it. Take your young people, your students, train them, disciple them, work hard with them, invest time one-on-one with them where necessary.

Take the weakest and the quietest and the sheepee, the most sheep-like ones amongst them. I wouldn't say Buddha, goose, but who knows what God will do with them? As a student, he'll be humble enough to be taught.

So you'll have a very strategic ministry, and by God's grace and power, he will use it to expand his kingdom greatly. Amen.

May it be so.