

# *The Total Package*

Acts 18:24-28

December 20, 2015

## **Apollos in Ephesus**

**18:23** Paul's third missionary period led him first from Syrian Antioch to "the region of Galatia and Phrygia," where he was "strengthening the disciples" (v. [23](#); cf. [14:22](#); [15:41](#)). His route most likely led through the Cilician gates to the cities where he had established churches on his first journey—Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch. The reference to the Galatian region and Phrygia might indicate the area further north and be evidence that Paul established churches in the northern portion of the Roman province of Galatia on his second missionary journey. In any event, Paul's final destination was Ephesus (cf. [19:1](#)). He had been prevented from working there on an earlier occasion ([16:6](#)). He had had to cut his first visit there short ([18:20](#)) and was eager to begin his mission in the city. Still, his desire for the new ministry did not lead him to neglect the old. He returned to his former fields and further ministered to the churches there. A journey to Ephesus by sea would have been much easier. The foot journey from Antioch to Ephesus was well in excess of 1,000 miles. Paul set a notable example of the importance of continued nurture of new converts.

**18:24** While Paul was en route, revisiting his former mission fields, Apollos arrived in Ephesus ([18:24](#)). Luke described him as a Jew and an Alexandrian native. Apollos was indeed a common name in Egypt, being a shortened form of Apollonius.

He is further described as “learned” (*logios*) and “powerful [*dynatos*] in the Scriptures,” which the NIV accurately interprets as his having a thorough knowledge of them.

**18:25** At v. [25](#) the description of Apollos becomes more ambiguous. He is pictured as having been instructed in “the way of the Lord.” Does this mean he was thoroughly acquainted with the gospel, the way of those who belong to the Lord? Or does it refer to the teaching of the earthly Jesus, the way that *he* taught? And what does the next phrase mean? The Greek reads literally “fervent in the spirit” (*zeōn tō pneumati*). The presence of the article before *spirit* would most naturally seem to indicate the Holy Spirit, and Paul used exactly the same phrase to refer to being “aglow with the Spirit” ([Rom 12:11](#)). Still, many translators and interpreters see this as a reference to Apollos’s own spirit, to his having a zealous temperament. (Compare NIV, “He spoke with great fervor.”) Their reticence to see this as a reference to the Holy Spirit is the last phrase used to describe Apollos, “He knew only the baptism of John.” In the Gospels and Acts, it is precisely the Holy Spirit who distinguishes the baptism of John from that of Jesus (cf. [Mark 1:8](#); [Acts 1:5](#)). How one could have known only the baptism of John and yet have received the Holy Spirit is hard to understand. Equally confusing is the reference to Apollos’s teaching about Jesus *accurately*. Obviously the teaching was not complete, or he would have known Christian baptism as well. Still, Luke depicted Apollos as a Christian. Apollos knew the way of the Lord, taught accurately about Jesus, and *may* have experienced the Spirit. Still he was deficient. He knew only John’s baptism, and he had to be further instructed by Aquila and Priscilla.

What exactly was the deficiency? Scholars have had a field day trying to define it more precisely. Apollos has been depicted as a disciple of John the Baptist, a heterodox Alexandrian Christian, a charismatic Christian, even a Jewish missionary and not a Christian at all. The trouble with all such views is that they concentrate on only one part of Luke's description and do not sufficiently account for his total picture. Perhaps it is best to leave the matter with Luke's description and not try to go beyond it. The one matter of deficiency given is that Apollos knew only the baptism of John. His understanding of Christian baptism was inadequate. Evidently it was not such that he needed further baptism. Luke did not relate his being rebaptized as were the disciples of John ([19:5](#)), only of his being further instructed by Priscilla and Aquilla.

[18:26](#) Priscilla and Aquilla had remained in Ephesus to carry on the work there until Paul's return ([18:18f.](#)). Evidently the ministry in Ephesus had not yet extended beyond the synagogue; and when Apollos began his Christian witness there, his deficiency quickly caught the couple's attention. They took him aside, probably in the privacy of their home (so NIV), and expounded the way of Christ more fully to him (v. [26](#)). The further instruction may well have included Paul's teaching concerning the Gentile mission. It is noteworthy that Priscilla took an equal role with her husband in further instructing Apollos.

[18:27a](#) Apollos then decided to go "to Achaia," i.e., to Corinth, where Paul had already established work. Apollos's work in that city is well documented by [1 Cor 1:12](#); [3:4–6](#), [22](#); [4:6](#). Why he decided to go there is not specified. The Western text provides

an explanation, greatly expanding v. [27](#) by saying that some Corinthian Christians who were sojourning in Ephesus invited him to minister in their native town. Aquilla and Priscilla more likely aroused his interest in Corinth, however, for they surely shared with him their ministry with Paul in that city.

The mention of the Ephesian brothers who provided a letter of recommendation for Apollos is significant because it is the first clear evidence that a church had by now been established in Ephesus. Such letters of recommendation were a common practice in the early church. Paul provided one for Phoebe of Cenchrea ([Rom 16:1](#)). He realized, however, that such commendatory documents could assume undue importance and could not take precedence over personal acquaintance ([2 Cor 3:1–3](#)).

**[18:27b-28](#)** Apollos was well received in Corinth and was himself a great help to the congregation. Luke's description of the Corinthians as "those who by grace had believed" is particularly appropriate. As a Pauline congregation the gospel they responded to was surely his appeal to salvation solely by God's grace through faith.

Apollos's power in scriptural interpretation (cf. v. [24](#)) suited him for debate with the Jews of Corinth. Much like Peter with the Jews of Jerusalem, he would have used the Old Testament to demonstrate that the Messiah must suffer and rise and that consequently Jesus was the promised Messiah. Evidently Apollos returned to Ephesus. When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians, probably in the latter part of his Ephesian ministry, Apollos was with him in Ephesus ([1 Cor 16:12](#)).

**- New American Commentary**

## **Apollos in Transition**

As the scene shifts to Ephesus, the inspired physician introduces a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth. At the time, Alexandria, located in Egypt near the mouth of the Nile, had a large Jewish population. So although reared outside Israel, Apollos grew up in a Jewish cultural setting. *Logios* (eloquent) appears only here in the New Testament. The word "can mean either a man of words... or a man of ideas" (A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* [reprint, 1930; Grand Rapids: Baker, n.d.], 3:306). Apollos may well have been both a learned and eloquent man.

More important, he was mighty in the Scriptures.

*Dunatos* (mighty) is related to *dunamis*, from which the English word "dynamite" derives.

*Graphais* (Scriptures), as always in the New Testament, identifies the Old Testament.

His learning and eloquence, coupled with his powerful treatment of the Old Testament, made Apollos a devastating debater (cf. v. 28). The rarity of such preachers is indicated by the fact that no one else is so designated as powerful in dealing with the Scriptures.

The church today is in desperate need of men like Apollos.

**That Apollos had been instructed in the way of the Lord does not mean he was already a Christian (cf. v. 26).**

**The phrase the way of the Lord is an Old Testament term for instruction in the things of God. God said of Abraham in Genesis 18:19:**

*I have chosen him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice; in order that the Lord may bring upon Abraham what He has spoken about him.*

**Judges 2:22** describes God's intent "to test Israel" to see "whether they will keep the way of the Lord to walk in it as their fathers did, or not."

In **Psalm 25:8-9** the psalmist declares, "Good and upright is the Lord; therefore He instructs sinners in the way. He leads the humble in justice, and He teaches the humble His way."

**The way of the Lord, then, was the path of spiritual and moral standards God expected His people to follow (cf. 1 Sam. 12:23; 2 Kings 21:22; Prov. 10:29; Jer. 5:4-5).**

**Apollos combined his deep knowledge and eloquence with a passionate heart.**

Luke describes him as **fervent in spirit**, having a soul fired with enthusiasm for the things of God. His zeal translated into action, as **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.** Based on his limited knowledge, **Apollos was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus.** He did not have a full understanding of the gospel, however, being **acquainted only with the baptism of John.**

### **QUOTE:**

**John's baptism was one of preparation for Messiah's coming (Luke 1:16-17). Apollos accepted John the Baptist's message that Messiah was coming. He even believed that Jesus was that Lamb of God (John 1:29) and Messiah. 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.**

Although his teaching was accurate, as far as it went, Apollos needed the rest of the story concerning Jesus.

Accordingly, when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. **Instead of publicly instructing Apollos, they tactfully took him aside**, possibly into their home, to speak to him. Having done so, **they explained to him the rich fullness of the truth concerning the Messiah's atoning death and resurrection.**

That the mighty preacher and scholar would consent to be taught by a lowly tentmaker and his wife attests to **his godly humility.**

After this wonderful instruction and completion of his faith, Apollos, armed with his newfound knowledge of God's gospel, **wanted to go across the Aegean Sea to Achaia**—specifically to its capital, Corinth ([19:1](#)). The **brethren** in Ephesus **encouraged him** to do so **and even wrote to the disciples** in Corinth to **welcome him** as a fellow Christian.

**Fulfilling his plan and arriving at Corinth, the eloquent preacher soon made his presence felt in both the Christian and Jewish communities.**

Luke notes that **he helped greatly those who had believed through grace**. The designation of Christians here as **those who had believed through grace** is the Spirit's way of **reminding all that faith is a gift of grace (cf. [Eph. 2:8](#))**. Apollos assisted the believers in their spiritual growth through his powerful preaching.



This fervent, brilliant Old Testament scholar also exploded like a bombshell on Corinth's unconverted Jewish community.

Like Stephen (6:8-10) and Paul (9:22) before him, Apollos powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

**Refuted** is from *diakatelegchomai*, an intense double compound word. Apollos was so effective in his discourse that he crushed his opponents, totally disproving them at every point.

**His devastating performance in the public debates made a profound impression on the Corinthian church. They soon held him in the same high esteem in which they held Peter and Paul (1 Cor. 1:12; 3:4, 6).**

It must have pained him (as it did Paul and Peter), to have one of the developing Corinthian church's factions identify with him.

**His successful transition from Old Covenant believer to New Testament saint was an immense blessing for the church.**

**- MacArthur New Testament Commentary**

## *The Completion of Apollos (18:24-28)*

THOUGH PERGAMUM WAS the capital of Asia, Ephesus (in modern Turkey) was the real seat of provincial administration. Being on the western shore of Asia Minor, it connected the Greco-Roman world with Asia Minor. In the first century it was a predominantly Greek city. It had a seaport on the mouth of the Caystar River, but it was subject to constant silting, which required dredging. Once the city diminished in importance, this dredging was not done; as a result, the site of Ephesus is now seven miles inland. The ancient harbor is now a marshy waste, though it can still be discerned in photographs. Ephesus was at the end of the Arcadian Way—a magnificent paved road that is still vis-ible—which led from the center of town to the harbor. Because it does not have any modern settlements, it is, in Bruce's words, "an archaeologist's paradise."

**Ephesus was the center of the worship of the Greek goddess Artemis (Roman Diana), the multibreasted goddess of fertility. It boasted a magnificent temple to Artemis, which was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.**

In Paul's time the city had lost some of its importance as a political and commercial center and was turning more to the temple to support its economy. In Christian tradition the city is associated more with John than with Paul. The second-century church father Irenaeus wrote that John went there after his exile on the Isle of Patmos and lived there to be an old man.

**A learned Old Testament scholar, Apollos, receives an important place in this narrative because he played a significant role in the growth of the early church.**

**Luke thus interrupts his description of Paul's journey to insert a section on the "completion" of Apollos's understanding of the gospel.**

This provides the only Christian contact we have in the New Testament with the Egyptian city of Alexandria (18:24), which became the intellectual center of Christianity and produced some of the greatest scholars of early Christianity (notably Clement and Origen). It had a large Jewish population, which included (until about A.D. 50) the famous philosopher Philo.

**Apollos's eloquence was surely a foretaste of things to come from that city.** "He appears to have been an itinerant Jew of a type not uncommon in the first Christian century—a commercial traveler who engaged in religious teaching as well as in trade."

**We are not told from where Apollos first heard about Jesus.**

The Western Text's addition to [verse 25](#) says that he had been instructed "in his own country," implying that Christianity had reached Alexandria by about A.D. 50. It may be that disciples of John who accepted Christ as the Messiah had gone there and taught him, for we are told that "he knew only the baptism of John" (v. 25).

**But we cannot say for sure where he had been deficient in his teaching.**

**Apollos's effectiveness** as a preacher is put down to three factors.

(1) **"He was a learned man with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures"** ([18:24b](#)), having been well **"instructed in the way of the Lord"** ([18:25a](#)).

(2) ***"He spoke with great fervor"*** ([18:25b](#)).

(3) He ***"taught about Jesus accurately"*** ([18:25c](#)).

#### **QUOTE:**

**He not only had a good knowledge of the Word, but he also knew how to communicate it accurately—that is, he had developed skills in Bible teaching. And when he taught, he did so with enthusiasm and fervency.**

**Into this situation Priscilla and Aquila entered ([18:26](#)).**

Luke has changed the order of their names from his first mention of them ([18:2](#)), giving the wife's name first (see also [18:18-19](#)). On two occasions when Paul sends greetings to this

couple, he mentions Priscilla first ([Rom. 16:3](#); [2 Tim. 4:19](#)), while Aquila is mentioned first when they send greetings through Paul ([1 Cor. 16:19](#)). On that occasion "it is quite credible that Priscilla insisted that her husband's name be put first." Priscilla may have been the more prominent of the two.

We are not told whether Apollos lodged in Priscilla and Aquila's home, but this act of inviting Apollos into their home is typical of the open home attitude that this couple had. Though Apollos "was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures" ([18:24b](#)), **he was willing to learn from his hosts when they took him home to "complete his education." We will see that this is a characteristic of a true student of God's Word.**

**We are not told whether Apollos was rebaptized, as were the Ephesian disciples whom Paul brought to a more complete knowledge of the truth (19:5).**

Apollos was probably a true believer in Christ with a deficient knowledge. Though there is much dispute about the status of the twelve Ephesian disciples, they had probably made less progress on the way to salvation. The believers in Ephesus sent off Apollos to Achaia with a letter of commendation. The sending of such letters was a common practice in those days (see [Rom. 16:1-2](#)).

**Luke focuses on [Apollos's ministry of apologetics among the unbelieving Jews](#) ([18:27-28](#)).**

**QUOTE: (powerfully speculative)**

**This has caused some to suggest that Apollos wrote the letter to the Hebrews; the Pauline elements in this letter are traced to the influence of Priscilla and Aquila and to the believers in Corinth. It seems apparent that the more wealthy and sophisticated members of the church were so impressed by Apollos's eloquence that they clung to him and depreciated the ministry of Paul, who spoke in such a way that the simplest people could understand (1 Cor. 1:12; 4:6). We cannot blame Apollos for this, however. This type of unhealthy comparison still happens among those who do not understand the biblical pattern of a variety of gifts within the body of Christ.**

BRIDGING Contexts:

**A. KEYS TO AN effective Bible teaching ministry.**

**Apollos's ministry reveals three features that characterize an effective Bible teaching ministry:**

- 1. Knowledge of the Word,**
- 2. Skill in method, and**

### 3. **Fervency of spirit** (18:24-25).

Apollos acquired his basic knowledge of the Word through the instruction he received. But he himself must have diligently given himself to study the Word. The skills of accurate interpretation of the story of Jesus would have come again through instruction by the church and through his applying himself carefully to improve this skill.

#### **QUOTE:**

**What of fervency? Is this a personality trait that only some have, which enables them to be good preachers? One's personality may be an asset to preaching, but it is not what lies at the heart of fervency. Fervency comes from a confidence in the truth and power of what we proclaim. This, of course, is ignited by the Holy Spirit. Such confidence is necessary on our part, and it comes through lingering with the Word in trustful meditation, study, and obedience.**

**Paul cited this as an attitude required of ALL Christians when he said, "*Never be lacking in***

*zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord" (Rom. 12:11).*

**The same words used there for "spiritual fervor" are used in Acts 18:25 of Apollos.**

**Such people exhibit the fervency of knowledge on fire. They become like Jeremiah, to whom God said, "*I will make my words in your mouth a fire*" (Jer. 5:14).**

**In other words, time spent in God's Word and confidence in the message give the knowledge, skills, and fervency needed to make a good Bible teacher.**

**B. How Bible scholars learn new truths.** The learned and eloquent Apollos, who already had "a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures," had still more to learn.

Several factors helped facilitate this learning.

**(1) The graciousness of Aquila and Priscilla** was an important element. When they saw a deficiency in his teaching, they did not publicly point it out. Rather, they took him aside privately and invited him into their home



(18:26). **In the warmth of that accepting environment they taught him what was lacking in his theology.**

**(2) Apollos's teachable attitude** must surely have helped. The truth of God is so vast that we will never plumb its depths or scale its heights. Thus, **until the day we die we can be learning.** Usually the more we know, the more we recognize that we have so much more to learn. **At the heart of a biblical attitude to the Word is a childlike eagerness to be fed.** Peter urged, "*Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good*" (1 Peter 2:2-3). **This applies to both new and mature Christians. We are all disciples of Christ, which means we are all learners.** The graciousness of the helper and the teachableness of the helpee give an environment conducive to great scholars taking the role of helpee and learning new truths.

**C. Opening our homes to help others in need.** The New Testament gives **three instances of Priscilla and Aquila's opening their home for service to God:** They kept the apostle Paul in their home in Corinth (18:3), they hosted a house church in Rome (Rom. 16:3-5), and they brought Apollos to their home in Ephesus to complete his education (Acts 18:26). This latter is an important type of hospitality—bringing people to our homes to help them in a time of special need. We do not know whether Apollos lodged at this home, but we know that his theological deficiencies were dealt with in the warmth of a home. We too

can use our homes to help people in need. This provides the fourth type of hospitality presented in Acts.

## Contemporary Significance

**QUOTE:** (personally riveting!)

**BIBLE TEACHING: A lost art? There have been mixed reports about the status of Bible teaching in the church today. Some feel it is a lost art, whereas others, especially in Britain, feel that a recovery of it within the church may have recently begun. With the reduction of the habit of reading, contemporary Christians have reduced the average time spent with the Word. This is true of preachers too. The thousands of study aids prepared to "take the sweat out of Bible study" may have done just that: taken away the thrill that comes from grappling with Scripture. Today's activist generation finds it difficult to set apart quiet time simply to sit and study the Scriptures. We have developed a laziness about reading and inductive study.**

The result is that much of so-called biblical preaching is not very biblical and gives evidence of shoddy Bible study. I am convinced that one of the reasons why Bible exposition has gone out of fashion today is that preachers are not willing to devote the time necessary to study in order to teach the Bible effectively. When we spend time in the Word with a heart open to hearing from God, it will begin to glow because it "is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword..." (Heb. 4:12). The result will be fervency.

### QUOTE:

In his classic book *Power in Preaching*, British Methodist preacher W. E. Sangster gives seven basics of good preaching. One of them is fervor or passion, and he entitles his chapter on it, "Glow Over it." He writes, "The glow must be the outward radiance of some burning light within." This characteristic is not limited to those whom we may describe as vibrant personalities. Sangster says, "At the point when one man declaims and gesticulates and uses the whole range of his voice (naturally and convincingly), another stands motionless, his voice almost a quiet monotone but a white heat burning at the heart of all he says."

As Stephen Neill has pointed out, there is "**one notable characteristic to be found in all the greatest teachers,**" whether from the East or from the West, and that is what he calls "intense seriousness."

There was a time when people were attracted to the gospel through the passion of the preacher.

**Benjamin Franklin** said he often went to hear **George Whitefield** preach because there, before his eyes, he could watch a man burn.

Sangster also reports on the description that **a powerful preacher** gave on how he prepared his messages, which **may give us a key to how our preaching can have fervency.** He said that he "read himself full," "thought himself clear," and "prayed himself hot."

*Study, reflection, & prayer are 3 keys to fervency, to having knowledge on fire.*

**QUOTE:**

**(cultural & contextual truth!)**

*Today, unfortunately, passion is being replaced by entertainment as a means of attracting people. Since we do not have the skills and discipline to develop informed, wise, and relevant preaching that can be passionately presented because it is true, we resort to a skill that is common in today's world: the ability to entertain.*

*Sometimes that medium becomes so important that the message ends up taking a back seat.*

*We fill our pews with people who come to church for the entertainment but who are unable to overcome the powerful temptations they face, for their worldview has not been shaped by the Word. The seriousness of Christianity has not been communicated to them through passionate preaching; they do not see it as a matter of life and death. The challenge in this media-oriented age is to package the truth with such quality and intensity that people will want to come and be fed, even if they are not entertained.*

## **Creating an environment conducive to leaders learning.**

Unlike what happened with Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos, we have encountered situations of potential learning today that have gone sour. Often this is because the teachers have not been wise in the way they confronted a leader whose knowledge was defective. Unfortunately, some people are so uncomfortable with personal encounter that they prefer to resort to public denouncing or to writing letters or, worse still, writing articles, rather than talking privately with the person concerned. The result is much hurt and usually little teaching that gets through.

## **Leaders will not learn unless they are teachable.**

### **QUOTE:**

The teachable attitude we described above should be true of anyone who truly understands the nature of Scripture. On the one hand, its vastness makes us realize that our knowledge will always be limited. On the other hand, its glory makes us eager to learn whatever new thing we can. These two factors combine with the attitude of childlike faith, which is basic to the Christian life, and prepare us for a lifetime of learning. The teacher-learner distinction subsides as a result of the eagerness to learn more of God's truth. The teacher enters into every teaching situation humbled by the realization that God's truth is so vast that there is more to learn and that some of this learning may come from unexpected sources, such as students or simple, unlearned Christians.

**Applications of the open-home principle.** Just as Priscilla and Aquila opened their home to help Apollos in his time of need, so we too can open our homes to people in need. The following texts imply that this is a basic aspect of Christian discipleship.

- *"Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality" ([Rom. 12:13](#)).*
- *"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen? ... Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?" ([Isa. 58:6-7](#)).*
- *"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me" ([Matt. 25:35-36](#)).*
- *"God sets the lonely in families..." ([Ps. 68:6](#)).*

Let us apply this principle of opening our homes in order to meet needs. **Christian homes can be places where unwanted or abused people are welcomed and even kept for a considerable length of time.** A great opportunity of welcoming aliens today is having foreign students over at our homes for a weekend or at least for a meal. I remember with great gratitude the refreshment this brought to me when I was a student in the United States. It is sobering that most foreign students in America never enter an American home before they leave for their home countries.

**- NIV Application Commentary**

## A Man with an Incomplete Message (Acts 18:23-28)

When Paul departed from Ephesus for Jerusalem, he left his friends Aquila and Priscilla behind to carry on the witness in the synagogue. Imagine their surprise one Sabbath to hear a visiting Jewish teacher named Apollos preach many of the truths that they themselves believed and taught!

Apollos was certainly an exceptional man in many ways. He came from Alexandria, the second most important city in the Roman Empire. A center for education and philosophy, the city was founded by (and named after) Alexander the Great, and it boasted a university with a library of almost 700,000 volumes. The population of Alexandria (about 600,000) was quite cosmopolitan, being made up of Egyptians, Romans, Greeks, and Jews. At least a quarter of the population was Jewish, and the Jewish community was very influential.

**Apollos knew the Old Testament Scriptures well and was able to teach them with eloquence and power. He was fervent ("boiling") in his spirit and diligent in his presentation of the message. He was bold enough to enter the synagogue and preach to the Jews. The only problem was that this enthusiastic man was declaring an incomplete Gospel. His message got as far as John the Baptist and then stopped! He knew nothing about Calvary, the resurrection of Christ, or the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. He had zeal, but he lacked spiritual knowledge ([Rom. 10:1-4](#)).**



The ministry of John the Baptist was an important part of God's redemptive plan. God sent John to prepare the nation of Israel for their Messiah ([John 1:15-34](#)).

**John's baptism was a baptism of repentance; those who were baptized looked forward to the coming Messiah ([Acts 19:4](#)). John also announced a future baptism of the Holy Spirit ([Matt. 3:11](#); [Mark 1:8](#)) which took place on the Day of Pentecost ([Acts 1:5](#)).**

***Apollos knew about the promises, but he did not know about their fulfillment.***

Where did Apollos get his message to begin with? Since Alexandria was a famous center for learning, it is possible that some of John the Baptist's disciples ([Matt. 14:12](#); [Luke 11:1](#)) had gone there while Christ was still ministering on earth, and shared with the Jews as much as they knew. **[The word instructed in Acts 18:25 means "catechized" and suggests that Apollos had personal formal training in the Scriptures.](#)** However, that training was limited to the facts about the ministry of John the Baptist.

## *Apollos' message was not inaccurate or insincere; it was just incomplete.*

When I travel in conference ministry, I depend on my wife to plan the routes and do the navigating. (I can get lost in a parking lot!) On one particular trip, we got confused because we could not find a certain road. Then we discovered that our map was out of date! We quickly obtained a new map and everything was fine.

**Apollos had an old map that had been accurate in its day, but he desperately needed a new one. That new map was supplied by Aquila and Priscilla.**

Aquila and Priscilla did not instruct him in public because that would have only confused the Jews. They took him home to a Sabbath dinner and then told him about Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit. They led him into a deeper knowledge of Christ; and the next Sabbath, Apollos returned to the synagogue and gave the Jews the rest of the story! In fact, **so effective was his ministry that the believers in Ephesus highly recommended him to the churches in Achaia. Here Apollos not only strengthened the saints, but he also debated with the unbelieving Jews and convinced many of them that Jesus is the Messiah.**

Apollos ministered for a time to the church in Corinth ([Acts 19:1](#)), where his learning and eloquence attracted attention ([1 Cor. 1:12](#); [3:4-6](#), [22](#); [4:6](#)).

**It is unfortunate that a clique gathered around him and helped bring division to the church, because he was definitely one of Paul's friends and a trusted helper ([1 Cor. 16:12](#); [Titus 3:13](#)).**

**- Bible Exposition Commentary**

24–26. (24) *“Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born in Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. (25) This man was instructed in the way of the Lord, and, being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning the Lord, understanding only the immersion of John. (26) He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. But Aquila and Priscilla, having heard him, took him and expounded to him the way of the Lord more accurately.”* The distinguished position which Apollos acquired, after this, in the Church at Corinth, and the familiarity of his name among disciples of all subsequent ages, renders it a matter of some interest to acquire an accurate conception of his personal endowments and his subsequent history. The former are set forth in the two statements, that **he was “eloquent,” and that he was “mighty in the Scriptures.”**

The gift of eloquence is a natural endowment, but culture is necessary to its effective development. That he was an Alexandrian by birth gives assurance that he was not wanting in

the most thorough culture; for **Alexandria, being the chief point of contact between Greek and Jewish literature, was the chief seat of Hebrew learning in that and some subsequent generations.** The Alexandrian Jews, who constituted a large element in the population of that city, were noted for their wealth and their learning.

*That he was “mighty in the Scriptures,” shows that he had been educated to a thorough knowledge of the word of God.*

*The apostles, being inspired, and able to speak with miracle-confirmed authority, were not entirely dependent upon purely scriptural proofs. But he, being uninspired, was entirely dependent upon the use of the prophecies and types of the Old Testament, in proof of the Messiahship.*

In a day when a knowledge of the word of God had to be acquired from manuscripts, and in which **the art of reading was acquired by only a few**, it was no ordinary endowment to be familiar with the Scriptures. Such an attainment is rare, even in the day of printed Bibles, and among preachers who *profess* to devote their lives chiefly to the study of the Bible. Indeed, the amount of clerical ignorance now extant would astonish the masses of men, if they only had the means of detecting it.

What were the exact attainments of this distinguished man in reference to the gospel is a question of some difficulty, though in reference to it there is a very general agreement among commentators. **It is generally agreed that he understood no more of the gospel than was taught by John the Immerser;** and of this the statement that he understood only the immersion of John is considered sufficient proof. But I confess myself unable to reconcile this supposition with two other statements of the historian, equally designed to give us his religious status. The first is the statement that he was “*instructed in the way of the Lord;*” and the second, that he “*taught accurately the things concerning the Lord.*” That the term *Lord* refers to the Lord Jesus Christ can not be doubted by one who considers Luke's style, and observes the connection of thought in the passage. But for Luke to say, at this late period, that a man was instructed in the way of the Lord and taught it accurately, certainly implies a better knowledge of the gospel than was possessed by John; for he preached him as one yet to come, and knew nothing of his death, burial, or resurrection. **The two expressions combined would, if unqualified, convey the idea that he understood and taught the gospel correctly, according to the apostolic standard. They are qualified, however, by the statement that he “understood only the *immersion of John.*”** This is the only limitation expressed, and **therefore we should grant him all the knowledge which this limitation will allow.** Whatever a man must lack, then, of a thorough knowledge of the gospel, who knows no *immersion* but that of John, we must grant that Apollos lacked; **yet the other things of the Lord he taught accurately.**

**His ignorance had reference to the points of distinction between John's immersion and that of the apostles, which were chiefly these:**

- 1.** John did not promise the Holy Spirit to those who were immersed...
- 2.** John did not immerse into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Whatever confusion of thought upon kindred topics is necessarily involved in ignorance of these two things, Apollos must also have been subject to; but **we are not authorized to extend his ignorance any further than this.**

**On these points he was instructed by Priscilla and Aquila, and was then able to teach the things concerning the Lord *more* accurately.**

**There is no evidence whatever that he was reimmersed.**

27, 28. **For some reason unexplained, Apollos concluded to leave Ephesus, and visit the Churches planted by Paul in Achaia.** (27) *“And when he desired to cross into Achaia, the brethren wrote, urging the disciples to receive him. When he arrived, he afforded much aid to those who through favor had believed: (28) for he powerfully and thoroughly convinced the Jews in public, clearly showing by the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.”*

**This is the earliest mention of letters of commendation among the disciples.** It shows that they were **employed simply**

**to make known the bearer to strange brethren, and commend him to their fellowship.**

The parties to whom Apollos afforded much aid were not, as some have contended, “those who believed through *his gift*,” for the term *charis* is never used in the sense of either a spiritual or a natural gift. Neither, for the same reason, can we render the clause, “he aided *through his gift* those who believed.” *Favor* is the true meaning of the original term, and it stands connected in the sentence with the participle rendered *believed*. If there were any incongruity in the idea of believing through favor, we might, with Bloomfield, connect it with the verb, and render the clause “he afforded much aid, through favor, to those who believed.” But through this is the only instance in which parties are said **to have believed through the favor of God, it is true of all disciples**; for the favor of God both supplies and the object of faith, and brings before men the evidence which produces faith. Luke's own collocation of the words, therefore, should guide us, and it rules us to the rendering, “he afforded much aid to those who through favor had believed.”

**Apollos mightily convinced the *Jews* in Achaia; whereas Paul's converts had been mostly among the Gentiles.**

This was, no doubt, owing to the peculiarity of his endowments, giving him access to some minds which were inaccessible to Paul.

*A variety of talents and acquirements among preachers is still necessary to the success of the gospel among the immense variety of the minds and characters which make up human society.*

**- A Commentary on Acts of Apostles**