

WHEN GOOD PEOPLE HAVE IT WRONG

Part of our plans for this year, as we work our way through the New Testament Studies, is to coordinate the Sunday morning sermons with something found in the reading that week. If you are following along with us, I am sure that you see a number of passages on which a sermon might be based. One of my challenges every week is to somehow choose from the many great texts on which to prepare my lesson. Others might choose different texts and topics to preach on, but I do my best to choose something that might be of help to you and give you something to think about.

I have a conviction that sermons and Bible studies should never be boring. **Hebrews 4:12** says that *“The Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*

I submit to you that lessons based on what that passage is talking about cannot be boring? They might cut you; they might convict you, they might make you feel a little uncomfortable, but they shouldn't bore you. What preachers have to do, to the best of their ability is to get out of the way and let the Scriptures speak. I'm sure I fall short a lot in that but that's my hope each week, to bring you a word from God.

With that in mind, I invite you this morning to open your Bibles to the **18th chapter of Acts**, and let's prepare our minds to think about “When Good People Have It Wrong?”

Please open to Acts 18, and we will begin reading in **verse 24**. Just put your ribbon or your finger at that place and we will get to it in just a moment. Before we read that text together, I want to ask you a few questions:

- *“Have you ever been wrong about anything?”* (I am sure all of us would have to admit that we have been wrong at times.)
- Another question: *“Is it possible for good people to make mistakes?”* (We know of course that it is.)
- And one more question: *“If a person is wrong, does that make them a bad person?”*

I've asked those questions to help us have the right perspective as we read this text together.

In Acts 18, we find the apostle Paul wrapping up his second missionary journey. He had come to Corinth, and there he met a Christian couple named Aquila and Priscilla. He worked with them there, spending about 18 months before heading back home in Antioch of Syria. On the way he makes a quick stop in the city of Ephesus. Even though some in Ephesus wanted Paul to

stay longer, he was anxious to go on, so he leaves Aquila and Priscilla behind who I am sure were instrumental in beginning a church there. And that is where our text begins this morning:

Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. 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, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26) He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately. 27) And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, 28) for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

Now, I find this to be an interesting passage and an interesting person. Luke tells us that he was a Jew. He tells us that he was from Alexandria, which was the second largest city of the Mediterranean after Rome. Alexandria had a large Jewish population, so much so that they governed their own quarter of the city. Alexandria was also known for its schools and its libraries. People who came from Alexandria were often very educated people, and that certainly seems to be true for this man. Why he came to Ephesus is not revealed to us, but it looks like he had taken it upon himself to take up the mission given to John the Baptist, to prepare the Jewish people for the coming of the Messiah, or Christ.

Luke also tells us that Apollos was an eloquent man. That no doubt referred to the fact that he was a very articulate speaker. The Greek word may also suggest that he was very logical; that is he was able to express things in very convincing ways. Luke says, he was “*competent in the Scriptures.*” That is, he was well acquainted with the writings we call the OT. He had made a thorough study of those writings, and no doubt was able to reference them easily as he spoke.

In addition to his training in Judaism, however, Luke tells us that he had also been “*instructed in the way of the Lord.*” Just what we are to understand by that is not entirely clear. We know that John the Baptist came preaching to people that they should “*prepare the way of the Lord.*” I take it to mean that Apollos was teaching people what the prophets had foretold about the coming of Christ. He was probably preaching, as John had done, for people to repent and be baptized.

Luke tells us that Apollos was “*fervent in spirit,*” meaning that he was passionate and enthusiastic about what he was preaching and doing.

He also, Luke tells us that Apollos “*spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus.*” Again I take that to mean, the things that the prophets of old had spoken and written about. Something like that is what had to be meant by what is said next, “*though he knew only the baptism of John.*”

What he knew about Jesus, from the Old Testament writings, he understood and taught correctly. The problem was, he didn't have all of the information. Apparently he was not aware that Christ had in fact already come and accomplished what had been prophesied. We might wonder, how could that happen? How could he have been instructed in the way of the Lord, and how could he know about the baptism of John, and yet still not know that Jesus had already come? That is a really interesting puzzle!

My thought on that is this. John the Baptist, in his work, set in motion a number of effects. We know that John had disciples. Undoubtedly one of those disciples went on to preach where Apollos was. Learning what he had learned from John, that disciple had instructed Apollos, and no doubt baptized him for the remission of his sins on the basis of his repentance. And no doubt Apollos continued to be instructed about this "way of the Lord," which led him into wanting to go and teach people about the Lord. All of that must have happened over in Alexandria, and it must have happened fairly soon following the beginning of John's ministry. I say that because we know from the gospels that Christ's own ministry commenced not much after John's ministry began, within a year or two at the most. John was still at the height of his popularity when Jesus came to him in the wilderness and was baptized by him. Jesus died within three years of beginning his work, but John was put to death before that. So for someone to go from Judea, carrying John's message and baptism to the people of Alexandria without also knowing that Christ had indeed come, it would have had to have been fairly soon.

So Apollos, like the many others who came to John in the Judean wilderness to be baptized, had no need to be re-baptized. That would explain why there is no mention of him being baptized a second time, while there are twelve men mentioned at the beginning of chapter 19 who were.

So when Apollos came to Ephesus, and as **verse 26** says, he "*...began to speak boldly in the synagogue*" Aquila and Priscilla heard him. They no doubt could not help but be impressed with him, but they also realized there was something very deficient in his understanding.

So notice carefully what they did—**verse 26**—they "*took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately.*"

Luke doesn't tell us what they shared with him, but they must have filled in all of the gaps in his knowledge. They must have explained that Christ had come, and no doubt they told him about all of the miracles Jesus did, proving that he was the Christ, the Son of God. I am sure they filled him in on how Jesus was arrested and put on trial and then put to death on the cross. And for certain they would have told him about the Lord's resurrection, and his ascension back to the right hand of God the Father. No doubt they would have told him also about the Lord giving the apostles the great commission, that they were to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, and how that those who believed that gospel and were baptized, received salvation.

And so, with that fuller understanding of what God had done through Christ, Apollos would now be able to preach the full gospel.

Which of course he began to do almost immediately. Luke tells us that it wasn't long until he wanted to cross over to Achaia, meaning taking a ship across the Aegean Sea to the tip of what we call Greece today. **Verses 27 and 28** says, that "*When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.*"

Now, I have brought you to this text today to get you to think about what needs to happen when good people get it wrong. We live in a religiously confusing and divided world. Not only do we have some people who do not believe in God at all, we have some who believe and practice one religion, and some believe and practice another. We have those who call themselves Jews, and those who call themselves Christians, and others who call themselves Muslim, and others who call themselves Buddhists or Hindus. But even among those who call themselves Christians, we have some who call themselves Catholics, others who call themselves Protestants. Within what is called Protestantism, we have hundreds and hundreds, some say thousands of different churches.

Surely it is not hard to see that some of these folks have it wrong; maybe everyone does to some degree or other. The question is, what needs to be done when good people get it wrong? Let me give you several "take-aways" that I see based on the example of Apollos and Aquila and Priscilla.

First of all, we should realize that some differences matter.

I know a lot of people today want to minimize any differences between what people of various religions, faiths and churches believe. They think that the specifics do not matter as long as people are sincere and doing their best. Well, there was no doubt that Apollos was sincere and was doing his best, but that didn't make up for what he didn't know and teach. He needed help and specifically what he needed was a more accurate understanding of the way of God.

In **John 8:32**, Jesus said, "*You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.*" My friends, ignorance is not bliss. It is not a blessing. Now I realize that neither I nor you know everything, and there is a good chance that some of the things we think we know may be wrong. But are we better off being wrong? I don't think so, and I don't believe others are either.

So in the first place, let us recognize that some differences matter, and it should be obvious that if something could have a bearing on one's relationship with God, with being saved, it surely matters a lot.

A second thing that I think we can take away from this example is that we must treat others the way we would want them to treat us, if and when we get something wrong.

You see, we have to realize that just because someone has something wrong, doesn't make them a false teacher or someone we have to pick a fight with. I realize we only have a brief

summary of what happened in the situation involving Apollos, but I don't get the idea that Aquila and Priscilla began by challenging Apollos to a debate, or calling him out in a public way. In fact, verse 26 makes it sound like they graciously took him aside, and spent some time teaching him. Now, I have no doubt that if after they had spent that time with him, helping him to have a more accurate understanding, that if he still persisted in teaching an incomplete gospel, their relationship with him would not have been the same.

But the point is, they didn't start out thinking of him as a false teacher and someone that had to be stopped. Incidentally, did you notice where they heard him speaking? They heard him as he was teaching in the Jewish synagogue there in Ephesus. Well, what were they doing there? Didn't they know that the old law had been nailed to the cross and that Judaism was dead? Is it possible they were there because they had a lot in common with those people and they were looking for opportunities to share the good news about Jesus with those who would listen?

Paul wrote to Timothy and told him that, *"The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, [and] correcting his opposition with gentleness"* (2 Timothy 2:24, 25).

Think about how you would want someone to deal with you if had something wrong. As Jesus said, treat others in the same way you want others to treat you.

Finally, I think we can take away from this example is that it is critical that we have the love and the boldness to speak up when good people have it wrong.

I'm not saying that we should go around challenging everybody on everything. Certainly, some discretion is needed in this, but on the other hand, if we never speak up when there is something that is critical, I believe we are letting the cause of Christ down in a very serious way. As Edmund Burke is so often quoted as saying, *"All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing."*

Love is the key. Do we have enough of the love of God in our hearts that we cannot keep quiet if people are in error about those that that really matter? Apollos needed help. It is obvious that he wanted to teach people about Christ, but what he did not know was keeping him from preaching a message that would truly save people. He was a powerful, gifted speaker, but there were some things that he didn't have right yet, and until Priscilla and Aquila helped him, all of his gifts and talents were of little use.

Edmund Burke also said, *"There is however, a limit at which forbearance ceases to be a virtue."* You see, there comes a time when being silent is no longer the loving thing to do. When that time comes, will the love that is in our hearts compel us to do the right thing, and will we be bold enough to do it? That too should be our prayer.

There are a lot of people in this world; a lot of people even in our world, that are good, good people. Amen? They are good people but they may have gotten some things wrong, so let's

learn a lesson from these friends of Paul. When good people have it wrong, let us consider carefully, “Do those things matter?” And “Will we do for them what we wish they would do for us?” And “Will we let the love of God give us the boldness to teach them the way of God more accurately?”

The lesson is yours but are you here this morning knowing deep within your heart that your life is not in a right relationship with God? Maybe it's not because you do not know better, maybe it is because you are not doing what you know! Have you been putting off fully obeying the Lord, delaying your decision to be baptized? If so, I want to encourage you today to not put it off any longer. Paul said,

“Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says, “In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.
(2 Corinthians 6:1-2)

If you need or want to respond to the Lord's invitation this morning, we are going to sing a song to encourage your heart, and we invite you to come while we stand and sing.

I am not saying that we should go around challenging everything we do not agree with. Certainly some discretion is needed in that, but on the other hand, if we never speak up when there is something that is critical, we let down the cause of Christ. As Edmund Burke is so often quoted, *“all that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.”*

Love is the key. Do we have enough of the love of God in our heart that we cannot keep quiet if people are in error about those things that really matter? Apollos needed help. It was obvious that he wanted to teach people about Christ. But what he didn't know was keeping him from preaching a message that would save people. He was a powerful, gifted speaker, but there were some things he did not have right yet, and until Aquila and Priscilla helped him, his many gifts were of little use.

Edmund Burke also said, *“There is, however, a limit at which forbearance ceases to be a virtue.”* You see, there comes a time when being silent is no longer the loving thing to do. When that time comes, will the love that is in our heart compel us to do the right thing?

And will we be bold enough to do it?

There are a lot of people in the world, and even in our world that are good, good people, Amen? They are good people but they may have gotten some things wrong. Let us learn a lesson from those friends of Paul's, Aquila and Priscilla, when good people have it wrong, let us carefully consider,

- 1) Do those things really matter?
- 2) Will we do for them what we want them to do for us?
- 3) Will I let the love of God in me give me the boldness to teach them the way of God more accurately?

The lesson is your, but are you here this morning knowing deep in your heart that your life is not right with God? Have you been putting off fully obeying the Lord; delaying your decision to be baptized? If so, I want to encourage you this morning to not put it off one day longer. Paul said, Behold today is the day of salvation. Now is the time and today is the day.

If you need or want to come forward for any reason, will you come while we stand and sing?