

In our previous passage we read of Paul's challenges when he arrived at Corinth. He was alone in a new city, overwhelmed, and afraid of what might happen. Soon after his arrival he met Aquila, and his wife Pricilla. They took Paul in, and allowed him to work in their business of tent making, so that Paul could provide for himself. They developed a life-long friendship, and God used all three of them to advance His kingdom.

As in the other cities where Paul traveled, he began his ministry in the local synagogue, where he reasoned with the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. Some believed, and some did not. Some became a part of the gospel movement, while others fervently opposed Paul, and his message. When Paul became frustrated with the Jewish resistance, he and a group of people, who had given their life to the Lord, formed a church that met right next door to the synagogue. This move infuriated the Jews, which added to Paul's anxiety. His fear left him, however, when the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision, and told him not to be afraid. The principle learned is that when the Lord calls, and gives us a purpose, He is with us, and will protect us, so we need not be afraid to do what God has called us to do.

In tonight's passage we will read of the end of Paul's second missionary journey, and the beginning of his third missionary journey. We will also see how when God takes one spiritual leader out of an area, he raises up others to fill in the gap, and to continue the ministry. Discover these things with me as we read Acts 18:18-28.

After years of starting new churches, and encouraging churches already established, Paul determined that it was time for him to return to his home church in Antioch. While he was in Corinth, Paul helped to establish a thriving church, even though he later had to write to correct their thinking on many moral issues. During his time in Corinth, he also wrote first and second Thessalonians, after Timothy rejoined Paul and gave a good report on the faith, and dedication, of the believers in Thessalonica. But after a year and a half of work in Corinth, it was time for Paul to move on, and others would have to fill in the gap.

When he left, Pricilla and Aquila left with him. It is unusual, in scripture, to see the wife's name mentioned ahead of her husband. The scriptures do not tell us why she is mentioned first, and many have tried to give an explanation. Our best guess comes from a literary analysis of Luke's writing style.

Whenever Luke writes about people, he does not seem to be concerned about social norms, but rather lists people in order of their importance to the events about which he writes. A good example may be understood from what we already observed. When speaking of Paul and Barnabas, he listed Paul's name first when he was the primary spokesman, as in the case of defending the gospel against the Jews, and mentioned Barnabas first whenever he is the primary spokesman, as in the case when the two of them went up to Jerusalem to argue that the gentiles did not need to be circumcised, or to become Jews, in order for them to be saved.

If Pricilla filled the predominate role during the events described, Luke would naturally mention her first. When Paul first met the couple, Luke mentions Aquila first, probably indicating that he was the one who first welcomed Paul and made him a part of their family business. This does not mean that Aquila was any more, or less, important; therefore when he mentions Pricilla first, it simply indicates that God used Pricilla in a more observable way than her husband, at that particular time.

Cenchreae is Corinth's southeastern seaport. From there the trio embarked on a ship to sail to Ephesus, back on the Asian continent. They left Silas and Timothy behind as ministers to

the churches. Luke was probably still in Phillipi. While in Cenchreae, Paul cut his hair, because he made a vow.

The bible does not tell us the details of this vow, but the cutting of Paul's hair suggests that he made a Nazarite vow, as described in Numbers 6:1-21. He may have made his vow after he had the vision to go to Macedonia. He may have made the vow when he first came to Corinth, and prayed about his fear. Paul may have made the vow when God gave him the vision, and told him not to be afraid, but to speak out boldly and share the gospel message. During the duration of the vow, Paul did not cut his hair, but after he completed his vow to the Lord, it was time for a haircut.

When they reached Ephesus, Paul once again went into the synagogue to preach to the Jews, who receive him more favorably than in the other cities, in fact, they wanted him to stay and teach them more. Paul had urgency in his heart to return to Jerusalem, probably to celebrate the Passover. When he departed, he left Priscilla and Aquila behind to minister in Ephesus.

Luke summarizes a 500-mile voyage to Caesarea, a trip up to Jerusalem, the celebration of the Passover, and Paul's return to the church in Antioch, in a single verse. Verse 23 is a transition statement that introduces Paul's third missionary journey; beginning with his return to the churches already established in what is modern day Turkey.

With that background the scene shifts back to Ephesus, and the introduction of a man named Apollos. Paul later wrote about Apollos in 1 Corinthians, and in Titus. He played a significant role in the development of the early church, especially in Ephesus and Corinth. As Paul left the area, God raised up someone else to fill the void, and to minister to the churches.

When churches today have strong godly leaders, and everyone's heart is right, when the local body of Christ is spiritually healthy, the people grow to love their pastors, and the pastors grow to love the members of the body. Sometimes, however, in the best of churches, God calls a Pastor to a different work. Even preachers have to retire sometime, or they may go to be with the Lord. This can be heartbreaking for the members of the church.

We should be encouraged to know that where God is at work, He will always provide the leadership needed to complete His will. As Paul left Ephesus, God sent a Jew named Apollos, to continue the teaching of the gospel, first in the synagogue, and expanding from there.

Notice the Apollos was gifted to preach, and teach. He was eloquent in speech, competent in handling God's word, and the Greek word picture is that he was on fire in the Spirit. Elsewhere Paul says, of himself, that he was not eloquent in speech. Could it be that Apollos was actually more effective than Paul in ministering to the Ephesians at that time?

We rightfully esteem Paul for the way that God used him to spread the gospel, to instruct us, today, on the application of our faith, and for penning half of the New Testament scriptures, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But, while God was at work in Paul, He moved in the hearts and lives of others to accomplish His will. The application of the biblical principle is that it really doesn't matter who is in the spotlight, or when. What is important is that each of us live in Christ, and that we submit ourselves to His revealed will.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes that some follow Paul, and some follow Apollos, but these are not things that should divide us. We are all servants of Christ Jesus. Our work is to glorify Him, by shining His light into this dark world. We need to see this passage under the lens of God's sovereignty. God moved Paul away from Ephesus, to do His work elsewhere, while He moved Apollos into Ephesus to continue the work Paul began. When God

moved Apollos to Corinth, a church started by Paul, He sent Paul back to Ephesus, where he had his longest ministry, in one place, that lasted between two, and three years.

The bible says that Apollos began to speak boldly in the synagogue, and accurately taught the things concerning Jesus. Apollos did exactly the same things as Paul, but he brought his unique set of gifts, his own personality, and charisma, so that the people of Ephesus might hear the gospel message from two slightly different perspectives.

In our own church, Brother Carl is the senior pastor. He is much more in the spotlight than I am. I'm fine with that; I don't have a desire to be in the spotlight. We have different personalities, and circumstances. We have different styles of teaching and preaching, and different gifts. What we have in common is a passion for the gospel, and the word of God. We have the calling of God into ministry. We have the same Spirit, and share a responsibility to this body of Christ.

God put us together in this place, and He uses our differences for your benefit. By having two approaches to the same truth, you receive a broader prospective on the word of God. When you add to that the ministries of the gifted teachers in our church, every member has a greater opportunity to grow in their understanding of God's word, and in their relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ

As gifted, charismatic, and effective as Apollos was in presenting the gospel, he still needed some instruction himself. God knew that, and that is why he kept Pricilla and Aquila in Ephesus, after Paul left. This powerful preacher needed additional instruction from a couple of tentmakers. There are two points I need to make in application.

First of all, a call to ministry is a call to preparation. When God called me into ministry, His specific call was to go to New Orleans to prepare yourself. I began preaching and serving as a pastor almost immediately, but I was also in training for what God had in store for me in the future. Every ministry requires a learning process. The process typically begins before the call, but it continues as long as we remain active. We never stop learning, and we never stop growing, so that we are as prepared as possible for whatever God may have next for us to do.

Many years ago a man in this church, who I love in the Lord, told me that God had called him into full time vocational ministry. I offered to make arrangements for him to tour NOBTS to see if that is where God would have him prepare. He said that he had no desire to go to seminary. He wanted to preach. I suggested that he begin with pulpit supply through the local association, but he said he would never be satisfied with preaching in a small church, he wanted to preach to thousands.

This is a gifted man that loves the Lord, but I am not sure that God called him to preach, and if He did, this man was unwilling to prepare. He has long since moved out of the area, but I still have some contact with him through facebook. He never did prepare, and he never entered vocational ministry.

The second point is that you do not have to wear a badge in order to encourage, and share wisdom with, someone who does have a badge. A couple of tentmakers graciously ministered to the most powerful preacher in Ephesus. I am a pastor by God's calling, but I value your insights, wisdom and encouragement. We need each other in order to have effective ministries

Paul's message, and Apollos' message were the same. Brother Carl's message, and my message are the same. Your message is the same as ours. Our message to the world is that Jesus is the Christ. In fulfillment of all scripture, at just the right time, God took on flesh and lived among us as a man. He came to sacrifice His life for ours. On the cross Jesus bore the sin of the whole world. Through repentance, we receive forgiveness of our sins. Through faith in Jesus, His

sacrifice, death, burial, and resurrection, we enter into a personal relationship with God that extends to eternal life. He seals us with His Holy Spirit. He pours out His grace into our lives. Through humble submission and obedience, God shapes our future, and gives us new meaning and purpose. Those who live in Christ know that there is no other way that they would want to live, because we are blessed, no matter what our circumstances. We have been made stewards of the good news that Jesus died for all sinners, and one only need receive Jesus in faith to be saved. If there are any here who have not come to Christ, this can be your night.