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A0926 – June 28, 2009 – Acts 18:18-28 – The Next Instrument:
Apollos

With Acts 18 we finish the second missionary journey of Paul. This is a time for winding up what's been done on this journey, for watching carefully how it closed down, and how God is setting them up for the third missionary journey.

So far Paul has moved from the church at Antioch, on the first journey, west to Cyprus, on up to Pamphylia, in what is now Turkey, and then going inland for a few of the cities; Paul then went all the way back to Antioch and shut down the first missionary journey. It was a pioneer work; certain things were clarified about Gentile salvation at the Jerusalem Council which had to be done at this time. And then the second journey began as a follow-up originally to the first one. But instead of going over seas Paul went over land, and went up to the same areas, the same cities in Turkey to follow up with those churches. When he left he went west but then it happened: he was blocked by the Holy Spirit from going into Asia. Asia, by the way, in the Bible, in the NT is a word that is a technical description of just the western tip of what is now Turkey. And Paul wanted to go there but he was stopped by the Holy Spirit; he had to go north and finally he could get west and so at this point in the road he turned to Troas, and there he saw the vision of the man of Macedonia calling out for Paul's help. So from there he sailed over to Philippi, went over to Thessalonica, down to Berea, further down to Athens and finally to Corinth. And so he has invaded Europe on his second journey.

He is at Corinth and that's where we pick him up in Acts 18:18. **Paul, having remained many days longer, took leave of the brethren and put out to sea for Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow. And he came**

to Ephesus. He's taking a ship back over the Aegean from **Cenchrea.** **Cenchrea** was the eastern port and apparently Paul set up a church there. So he puts out to sea to go to **Syria,** evidently his final destination, but along the way the ship stops at **Ephesus,** then he's going to go down apparently to Jerusalem. That is why Paul originally wanted to leave, he wanted to do something in Jerusalem, so he stops over at Ephesus and then sails on rather quickly (about 600 miles) to the port at Caesarea, goes up to Jerusalem and then goes down to Syrian Antioch and finishes the second expedition. So in verse 18 we find him leaving the harbor of **Cenchrea.** He had stayed in Corinth for about two years. Lots of people came to the Lord in that city; he taught them doctrine, giving those people a base and then he leaves. And he's going to take with him this couple, this **Priscilla and Aquila** who were such an encouragement. They're going to set sail with him to **Ephesus.** They were in the tent-making business and Paul had joined hands with them for awhile to earn a living. We don't know for sure why they left Corinth. They had recently been booted out of Rome by the edict of Emperor Claudius and now after a short settlement in Corinth they're moving on to Ephesus. We speculate they may be setting up another branch office of their tent-making business. The business is firmly established in Corinth; they set a manager over that office and move to Ephesus to start a new office. And so they have one operation here in Corinth and they have another one in Ephesus. Why Ephesus? Because Ephesus was the largest commercial city in Asia and that being the case it's the most common sense candidate for setting up a branch office. That's all, just common sense. So Priscilla and Aquila are going to go with him and obviously not only are they going to move their business there but it turns out they will be great help in establishing a new local church there later on. So watch how the early Christians, unbeknownst to them at the time, ended up combining business moves with advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's why I've said before anyone who looks close enough at the details of the Book of Acts has to agree that this is not the Acts of Peter and Paul or the Acts of the Apostles. The major player is the Holy Spirit; it's His Acts that dominate the stage. And so we get a picture of how the Holy Spirit providentially rules history. No one could orchestrate the kinds of things God the Holy Spirit has going in the Book of Acts. And it's a model for how he runs history today. Your lives, my life, are all being weaved together into His great tapestry of history. And the chance meetings you have aren't by chance, they're by design. Someone is behind the scenes moving the pieces around in just the right places, just the right times. Acts is a

tremendous testimony to the providence of God in history and yet, on the other hand, all along people are making responsible choices, doing their thing. The Bible has no problem with the sovereignty of God and human responsibility.

Now, with Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus, they set up their business. In a few years Emperor Claudius will die, the ban on Jews will be lifted and they will go back to their original home in Rome. That's Rom 16:3. But in the meantime they're expanding their business into two branch offices, Corinth and now Ephesus and this sets up resources to help the church get going in those cities.

Now, in verse 18 we also read that down at the harbor Paul got a hair cut. Why did he get a hair cut? It says because of a vow. Well, what was the vow? Does this mean that Paul, the great apostle of grace, who kept telling us the Law couldn't save, circumcision couldn't save, is now violating grace. Is Paul contradicting himself? Earlier he had Timothy circumcised. Did that violate grace? Later on he'll take a vow in Jerusalem that looks real bad. Did that violate grace? This is the first vow and we want to look into this issue of vows.

Vows are promises to God; in the OT vows were used not legalistically but willfully. If the believer wanted something from God then he would make a vow to God and say, I'm going to do this certain service Lord and he'd perform the service and then he'd be released from the vow. Maybe it was a pressure situation, maybe business was bad, maybe his marriage was sour, maybe it was persecution, but something was wrong and they'd make these vows. Lord I vow to do this if You get me out of this jam. That's what Martin Luther did when he was caught out in one of the worst thunderstorms of the 16th century in Germany and he said, Lord, if you get me out of this I vow to be a monk. And he did it, he became a monk. God had other plans for the monk; he became the great propagator of the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. But that's the idea of a vow. The place this comes from in the OT is Num 6. That whole chapter is about the Nazirite vow. We don't know much about why they took these vows, there's not much about the reasons. It just tells us what the vow consists of, no haircuts, no drinking wine, no touching dead bodies and what to do if a person fell over dead standing right next to you. It tells the kinds of sacrificial procedures to go

through when that kind of thing happened and how to make it good. So, the point is that the OT Nazirite vows were voluntary, they weren't legalistic. They did it because there was a situation they wanted the Lord to help in and so for a period of time they kept it and then they would be free of the vow.

Well, in Acts 18:18 Paul cuts his hair it says because he had a vow. We don't know if it was a Nazirite vow or not but apparently his vow included not cutting his hair. So he had long hair. He'd been growing it out for at least 18 months, which shows you most Jewish men didn't have long hair. Long hair was the sign of a vow; the normal Jewish male haircut was short. So contrary to modern paintings of Jesus with long hair and a beard Jesus had short hair and was clean shaven. This is also the unanimous portrayal of Jesus for the first nine centuries of church history. All the catacomb drawings, all the paintings show Jesus with short hair and clean shaven. The long haired hippie Jesus by Holman Hunt is a modern of portraying Jesus and is not the way most Christians have thought of Jesus.

Now what was the vow Paul made so he let his hair grow so long? Well, obviously we don't know for sure. The text doesn't say. But we can deduce something from the text. At Corinth Paul was a discouraged man. He was discouraged by the fact that every city he entered in Europe there was some major problem and eventually he would be run out of town. And it may well have been that when he came to Corinth he vowed in some way, Lord, if you'll just let me get something started here at Corinth and let me go and teach the word for awhile that I'll keep this vow. And the Lord said he'd protect him, so he didn't cut his hair until it was time to leave and now that he's on the docks, he's completed his service, and the Lord has protected him, now he cuts his hair.

Acts 18:19, **And he came to Ephesus**, it says, so we now have him coming to Ephesus, with Priscilla and Aquila, **and he left them there**, the point being that he's not going to stay in Ephesus. This is all stage setting. Remember Luke's argument: Luke is testifying as to how the Holy Spirit is getting the witness of Jesus Christ out - it goes first in Jerusalem, then to Judea and Samaria and finally to the remotest parts of the earth. Now it's time for Asia to get a taste of the word of God and so he sets two people on the stage, Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus. Now what had happened before? Earlier in the journey Paul was coming across and all of a sudden the Holy

Spirit said to Paul, uh, uh, not now, He put up a road block to Asia. He didn't want Paul in Ephesus then. That's Acts 16:6. Paul had wanted to go, the Holy Spirit said not now. Why? The timing was all wrong; those people weren't ready to hear the word of God. God had a plan for the Ephesians, but those people were not ready for the plan. Paul wasn't ready either. He was a minister of the word of God but God had to prepare him for that particular ministry. And so had Paul gone then it would have been a mess, no resources, wrong time, wrong place, wrong everything. But now things are changing. Paul's better prepared, the people are ready, Priscilla and Aquila are there to get some resources going. Verse 19 - **They came to Ephesus, and he left them there. Now he himself entered the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.** So he has a little time, he drops by the synagogue, does his normal thing, goes to the Jew first and reasons with them. Now, verse 20, **When they asked him to stay for a longer time, he did not consent.** Now why do you suppose he didn't consent? You can tell he's anxious to get somewhere. But you'd think if someone was positive to the word of God Paul would stay on. Paul doesn't stay on. Paul is on a mission to get somewhere. If you have a KJV or NKJV based on the TR, it may say something like "I must by all means keep this coming feast in Jerusalem." It may be that Paul wants to get to Jerusalem for Passover. Passover in AD52 was in early April. If that's the case then here Paul's in Ephesus, but he doesn't have much time because the seas were closed to sailing until March 10. So the seas have just opened and if Paul's going to make it for Passover he has to book it. And the ship was about to set sail.

So Paul then in v 21 leaves and he says **I will return to you again if God wills...if God wills**, don't you mean if you choose to come back Paul. No, **if God wills**, is a simple expression used several times by Paul to say we're in God's hands, God controls history and if He wants me back here I'll be back, if not I won't. And **he set sail from Ephesus.** ²²**When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church.** That's the church at Jerusalem, not Caesarea. **he went up** is technical for Jerusalem, the high ground. He did his thing there **and went down to Antioch**, up here to the north. At this point the second missionary journey has ended. That's it. Paul had left with Silas, he picked up Timothy, he picked up Priscilla and Aquila, but he left them all on the field and came back to his missionary base alone. Now, he's in **Antioch** and from verse 22 on up to Acts 19:1 Paul drops out of the narrative and the focus is on another man. Why? To show you that God

the Holy Spirit is giving gifted men to the church. God supplies this man. But the people that Paul left in Ephesus have spiritual gifts too. And it's their gifts that help move this man into an influential position. And so a very interesting man by the name of Apollos comes on the scene. Let's look at him.

Acts 18:24, Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. ²⁵This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; ²⁶and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. ²⁷And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, ²⁸for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

Who is this mysterious **Apollos**? Apollos was what A.T. Robertson called a dynamo preacher of the word of God. This man knew Scripture inside and out. Many scholars have thought that he wrote the one anonymous NT epistle, the Book of Hebrews. And if you have studied Hebrews, you must conclude that whoever wrote it was tremendously mighty in the Scriptures. He had a grasp of the OT that was phenomenal; absolutely phenomenal grasp of the OT. The author of Hebrews is so brilliant I'm afraid to teach it. There are certain books I'm afraid to teach because the author was so knowledgeable in the Scriptures that I have a hard time figuring out what he's doing and I'm afraid I'll just mess it up. So this is the kind of guy the Lord brings into the early church - a man mighty in the word of God, a great intellect. He's from Alexandria, Egypt which had one of the most fantastic libraries in the ancient world. So now we've had three great intellects in the early church; Stephen, then Paul, now Apollos. I find it interesting that all were Diaspora Jews, not a single one of these guys was from Jerusalem, the center of Bible teaching. These were outsiders, men who were cosmopolitan in outlook, men who saw the greater implications for the plan of God and the cross of Christ. Men who saw that this Christ is bigger than Jerusalem and the Jewish people and therefore were willing to do what most narrow minded Jews were unwilling to do - take the gospel out, out to the remotest parts of the earth.

So let's see a little bit about this man **Apollos** and how he's described in vv 24, 25 and 28. In verse 24 he's described as **an eloquent man**, *aner logios*, which means an excellent orator, very eloquent in his presentation but it also means very learned. We'd say he's an idea man, a thought man, excellent orator. Then he's described, same verse, as **mighty in the Scriptures**. This man was very well-acquainted with the Scriptures; he knew how to use the Scriptures. He was not a novice; this man was an expert in the Scriptures. Then in verse 25 a third description: he is **fervent in spirit**. In other words, this man teaches the word of God aggressively. He's not up there half-heartedly. He's very aggressive when he speaks the word of God. It can be a bad thing if you don't know the Scriptures but if you do know the Scriptures that translates into a very powerful presentation. And then, v 28, describes the results of this, **powerfully refuting the Jews in public**, which is the obvious result when you put these characteristics together. So he went head to head with the Jewish rabbi's from the Corinthian synagogue. They'd had to debate with Paul, now they have to debate with Apollos. And we can tell from this word that whether the rabbi's believed Jesus was the Messiah or not, Apollos had the last word. They had nothing to say in reply. And so this man was a powerful apologist. He was a mighty defender of the Christian faith. He didn't just sit up there and go la, la, la, la, la, and sit down; he fought and defended the word of God.

The great teachers of the first century church were all Biblical apologists that worked with the text. That's what made them great; they spent time in the text. The more time you spend in the text the easier it is to defend the word of God. The greatest apologist is he who is most well-schooled in the text. Before you can develop any kind of decent theology or view you've got to be acquainted with the text. You don't come driving into the Scriptures at 100 miles an hour and pick up a verse here and build a whole theology out of that. You have to go through the text. If I built doctrines out of single texts I could probably X out about 99% of the rest of the verses and I'd have to save my position. But this is the way people usually build their beliefs. I've had people come up and say, well, the Bible says no longer Jew or Greek, male nor female and therefore women can be teachers of the word of God. And you ask them, "Where does it say that?" "Oh, I don't know, but it's in there, it's in the Bible." And finally, "Yeah, Gal 3:28, that's it." Well, did you ever think if there's neither male nor female why does the NT not just go neuter? Why does it keep talking about male and female? It's phony stuff. They're not interpreting in context, and that's how most people get their theology, I found a verse one day.

Take for example Acts 2:38, the signature verse of the Church of Christ - Repent and be baptized. Does anyone check the context? Does anyone even ask who Peter's talking to? Apparently not. We just make Acts 2:38 the end

all of every debate, just make that THE text on how to be saved and if you don't get water baptized then you're going to hell. Well, excuse me for asking, but why is it if water baptism is so important did Paul say in Corinthians, Christ didn't send me to baptize but to preach the gospel? Now if baptism was a part of the gospel Paul would have obviously preached it. See, it's that kind of an idiot interpretation that people build their whole theology on that gets people all screwed up. Apollos wasn't like that.

And we have all sorts of things, all kinds of things that are in the Scriptural text that no one wants to talk about. Sometimes I want to teach the Song of Songs just so you can see some of the triple X stuff in the word of God. I actually think it would be healthy to take a look at what the word of God says about sex. It is X-rated stuff and its in there. Sometimes the translators gloss it over but in the original it's pretty graphic. You virtually have a woman doing a pole dance in the Song of Songs and people say "Oh, that's erotic." "Yes it is erotic." But I didn't write that, God wrote that. So don't blame me if you get embarrassed. That's the word of God. There is nothing wrong with eroticism inside of marriage. Part of the problem I think we have and we shy away from these parts of the word of God, is they never get addressed and we suck up a pagan view of sex. And we get real queasy about it, we never talk about it. The only influx of information about sex comes from what we're inundated with from the world system. And it's no wonder we have such problems in the area of sex and marriage. We can't even get one of the basic elements of marriage right. We don't even know what God says about it because we're fundamentalist and we don't talk about that; we don't care if the Holy Spirit wrote it, who's He, I'm a fundamentalist. So we have this kind of thing and we have to watch it because it kills off the freshness and the content of Scripture when we do this. Apollos and Paul and men like them taught the whole counsel of the word of God, not just the culturally accepted pieces.

So Apollos now comes as the third great biblical apologist in the early church. He comes out of **Alexandria**, Egypt. In Alexandria there was a great concentration of Jewish scholars. Alexandria had the greatest library of the ancient world, unfortunately it was burned, but oh, if it hadn't been burned. Alexandria had hundreds of thousands of manuscripts in the ancient world, most of them anyway. In the library at Alexandria you could have gone through, we could have recovered the vast secrets; who was the Pharaoh of the Exodus for example? Can we correlate Egyptian history with Biblical history and therefore find out the name of the Queen who pulled Moses out of the Nile? Can we discover Moses Egyptian name in their literature? He's got to be in Egyptian records somewhere. Who is Joseph? Does he appear in the records of ancient Egypt? He must appear. He was Pharaoh's top adviser. And all these questions could be settled for us once for all if only this library

in Alexandria had survived - but it didn't. Before that library was destroyed, there was a Jewish philosopher who went to Alexandria to study in that library and Jewish men began to congregate around him and to learn and later another Jewish philosopher rose to prominence there by the name of Philo and there were other men who studied in Alexandria. Jewish families began to thrive in the city and some of them would travel back and forth to the land of Israel, visiting family, doing rabbinic study, engaging in commerce and some of them of course came into contact with John the Baptist when he began to witness of Jesus of Nazareth.

And that's where this guy Apollos, in verse 24, comes from. He comes out of Alexandria and notice where he comes, **to Ephesus**. Who just left Ephesus? Paul just left Ephesus. Paul was only there for a few days. He went into the synagogue of the Jews and reasoned with them from the Scriptures and he had more pressing engagements so he took off. They wanted him to stay but he had to leave. So who does the Lord bring in to replace Paul, verse 26? Another Paul. Another man mighty in the Scriptures who marches right into the **synagogue** and begins speaking boldly to the same Jews Paul spoke to. What's the effect of that? How does that affect people? You get the cumulative effect, don't you? Now we don't just have one Jew going around saying this Jesus is the Christ, we have two Jews saying it, both of them powerful in the Scriptures and this begins to persuade people. They begin to consider more carefully, is this Jesus the Christ?

Now it's noted we said that this man was **eloquent**. And what that means is not only his oratorical skill but also a lot of learning. But this man did have oratorical skill. Having grown up in Alexandria and being around the philosophical schools there he'd learn to articulate things in an eloquent way. Some people, we learn from the epistle to the Corinthians, liked Apollos more than Paul, others liked Paul more than Apollos, but what the Apollos lovers liked was his eloquence. We gather from the comparisons of these two men that Apollos was the more eloquent of the two. And we can see from v 27 that there was a desire in Apollos to go over to Achaia. Actually where he went was Corinth and we think from scribal insertions in the Western text that some of the Corinthians that heard Apollos over in Ephesus really liked his eloquence and they said, hey, we want this guy as our pastor and so they called him to go to Achaia and that's how he got there.

But before we go there think what God has done for the Ephesians? What a help for the Ephesians. They wanted to hear more of Paul but Paul left and what do you know but the Lord provides a man of Paul's caliber to replace him in the meantime. Now we've got two Paul's running around. Apollos is another Paul; look at him, in verse 25 he **had been instructed in the way of the Lord**; imperfect tense, this man had been trained; years and years of

instruction this man had been given the word of God. He was given oral instruction. It was repetitive training, over and over and over repeating the word of God. Repetition is the mother of all knowledge and his Jewish parents were excellent drill sergeants. They drilled and they drilled and they drilled the word of God into their son until they could say, alright, he's got it. According to the verse at he'd been drilled at least up to the **baptism of John** including some things about **Jesus**, which, by the way, was about 20 years earlier. Apollo's knowledge comes up to probably AD30-31. Now it's AD52. So that means he would have known of the baptism of Jesus, he would have known probably of the deity of Jesus, the virgin birth of Jesus, that he was the Messiah, the one John pointed out as the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world, and that's probably all he knew. The story stopped there for Apollos. But he was faithfully and accurately preaching what He knew. I think every pastor has to do that, he has to preach what he knows. Obviously he can't preach what he doesn't know. But just because you don't know everything doesn't mean you don't teach at all. Case in point: Apollos - he had been **instructed in the way of the Lord** and up to the point of the story he knew, he taught if correctly.

Then Aquila and Priscilla come on to him and here's where you see the neat way the body works together. Here's a couple, Christian couple involved in business, who probably aren't teachers. Their ministry isn't to go out like Paul and Apollos and teach the word of God and take on the high powered opposition. Their ministry was more behind the scenes. And we can kind of easily in our imaginations think of what happened. Aquila and Priscilla had gone to the synagogue one Friday night and they heard this guy Apollos and they listened closely. They had been with Paul, so they had a criteria to judge what a man said; they were up to date on the most recent theology and as they listened they said this guys a great teacher but he's missing something, he's got a few gaps in his knowledge. We can help him fill in the gaps so let's invite the guy over for dinner. So the next day comes and he's teaching on Saturday morning, they invite him over, he accepts the invitation and went over for dinner in their home. And they had a grand conversation where they worked with this man and explained to him the "rest of the story," and that had a fantastic effect. Look at the effect they had; they saw a very gifted man and they gave him the new information, got him straightened out on the basic details regarding the trial of Jesus, His crucifixion, His resurrection, His forty days of ministry and His ascension unto heaven to the Father's right hand. They did all this quietly in the presence of their own home. They didn't damage his reputation by trying to

correct him publicly in the synagogue, they waited until they had him privately and they had a discussion. And then, vv 27-28, they sent the guy off. **And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him;** see that? They encouraged him. Probably that's primarily Priscilla and Aquila, but notice how other believers have spiritual gifts too. God gives all believers spiritual gifts and they work mutually between one another. There's no such thing as a lone ranger in the Christian life, not even a powerful teacher like Apollos can make it all alone in the Christian life. They needed him and he needed them. It's a body of believers, not an individual believer out there wandering on his own. Sometimes we wander for a short period of time but we all need to come back to a body of believers for mutual edification. Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves.

And so in verse 27 he arrives with his recommendation letter in Achaia and it reports that **he greatly helped those who had believed through grace,** ²⁸**for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.** Observe how helpful it is to have a powerful biblical apologist defeat the opposition. It doesn't mean Apollos helped them by patting them on the back and telling them, oh, everything's going to be okay now. What he did was help them by showing them the superiority of the word of God. They were able to see with their own eyes **public** debate between Apollos and the Jews, and they said, my goodness the word of God is powerful. We couldn't stand up to those Jews, we didn't have an answer for their objections, but Apollos did. Apollos had the training, Apollos had the background knowledge and when they saw him able to use the Scriptures to silence the critics that solidified their faith.ⁱ I think that's always the case, when we see Christianity vindicated in a public forum we sort of on the inside flex our muscles and say, yeah, go smash'em. We love that because it's a public demonstration of the power of God. The word of God is powerful and it can knock anyone down. And it reminds us, hey, I don't have anyone to fear, I don't have any argument to fear. I may not have the answer today, but I know the word of God does have an answer and surely there's another Christian out there that can help me find it and if I can just get their help and they can share with me their spiritual muscle, then I'll have answers. That's building up the body of Christ.

So we come to the close of the second missionary journey and the beginning of the third. This is a transition period and though Paul is sort of inactive over in Antioch the Holy Spirit is not inactive. He's bringing in trained men, good men, equipped people, not a lot. There are only three people we've mentioned, Priscilla, Aquila and Apollos. But that's all God needs; he only needs three people, two to handle the background details and one to hit the showroom floor, and particularly a guy like Apollos that has all the theological equipment, a man like that can really go. This should encourage us that Jesus Christ shall reign and that Jesus Christ has never given up providing for His church men and women to carry forth the great commission to evangelize the world. And it will be carried out.

ⁱ Acts 18:27-28 is the background for 1 Cor 3:6, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth."

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