

February 4, 2007  
“Do You Care Enough to Confront”  
Acts 18:24-28

Throughout the Book of Acts we have learned that God uses all kinds of people. The survival of God’s work is not dependent on any one person. Whenever God needs a leader for his people, he is more than capable of raising one up. In our study of Acts we have learned that people like Peter, Stephen, Philip, and Paul were greatly used of God but the Kingdom’s work can go on quite well without them. God can and does use a variety of people to accomplish his will on earth.

In the wake of having our minister of music accept a call from another church, a choir member said Wednesday night “As much as we will miss him this is God’s church and he will simply lead us to the next director of music.” The church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ. Church leaders come and go, but God’s work continues to be accomplished by men and women whom he calls into service.

In these verses we are introduced to a new leader of the church—Apollos. Luke takes a break from following the journeys of Paul and tells us of a young preacher fresh out of Alexandria, Egypt. No doubt Apollos was a very impressive man. No where in the New Testament is anyone described with such great attributes and abilities, certainly not Paul. Apollos would have been listed in most anyone’s Most Likely to Succeed. It’s almost as if Luke is putting this guy up for man of the year. Listen to how Luke describes him: Apollos is a “learned man” (v. 24). “Learned” in this instance means that Apollos was a very eloquent speaker, a gift highly prized by the ancients. Since Apollos came from the great city of Alexandria, he was probably trained by the great Jewish scholar, Philo. Philo is known to this day as one of the great interpreters of the Old Testament. If Apollos were trained by Philo, then his skill in interpreting the Old Testament must have been extraordinary.

Luke adds that Apollos has a “thorough knowledge of the Scriptures” (v.24). This word “knowledge” in the Greek is an interesting word. It actually means that Apollos was “powerful” in the Scriptures. We derive the word dynamite from this word “powerful.” Apollos’ ability to communicate Scripture was of such force that it was explosive.

But the litany of attributes goes on. Apollos had been instructed in the way of the Lord. He spoke with fervor, a sort of bubbling energy that attracted listeners. And he also taught about Jesus “accurately.” Finally, Apollos was not shy about sharing the message of Jesus; he spoke “boldly” in the synagogue.

Wow! Apollos had all the gifts. Being from Alexandria, he probably had a little accent that added charm to his sermons. Even his name has a certain ring of authority to it: Apollos. This guy was the real deal, he had the total package.

But there was one minor, very slight problem: Apollos knew only of the “baptism of John.” Now scholars are puzzled by this statement of Luke. What did he mean that Apollos only knew of the baptism of John? No one is really certain. But there have been some very good educated guesses. Take your Bible and read about John’s preaching in Luke 3:8-18. John’s preaching focuses on moral duty, ethical responsibility. “Every tree,” says John, “that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire” (Lk. 3:9). John’s preaching and ministry was to call people to repentance, to change the way they lived their lives—to do their moral duty, to obey the laws of God. John’s sermons were basically a series of admonitions of do’s and don’ts—don’t do this, do this, etc. Of course, to Jewish ears that sounded pretty orthodox, nothing too upsetting about those kinds of sermons.

If the way of Jesus were only moral teaching that would not have caused a big stir in Ephesus. The Stoic and Epicurean philosophers would have preached much the same thing. To be sure Apollos was very good at this kind of moral preaching and I suspect that he grew quite a crowd at the synagogue.

When Priscilla and Aquila heard the young and passionate Apollos, I’m sure they were impressed. They probably had never heard anyone so educated and so eloquent. How easy it would have been for them to simply have overlooked the flaws in his theology. But Priscilla and Aquila truly cared about this zealous spokesman for God. Moreover, they knew that Christianity was far more than mere morality. If the way of Jesus was just about morality, God could have faxed down a standard of do’s and don’ts and then kept score--so many do’s and you’re in, so many don’ts and you’re out.

Priscilla and Aquila were convinced that Jesus was God’s presence in the world. Through Jesus one came to know the one true God. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the way to God was opened to the entire world—to anyone whose heart was open to God. Without doubt Jesus was more than a moral code of right and wrong.

The NIV tells us that the couple invited Apollos “home” with them. But actually the Greek rendering is a little different. In the Greek the literal translation is “They took him unto them.” It is a very tender phrase that conjures up an image of a parent taking up an injured child in the parent’s arms. Thus, the NIV uses “home” to express this tender phrase. The words express warmth, fellowship, encouragement, even endearment.

The purpose of taking Apollos unto them was so that Priscilla and Aquila could confront the young preacher about his theology. Confront is a pretty strong word but the need to help Apollos with his understanding of the faith was a priority. What is interesting is that I doubt whether Apollos ever realized he was being confronted. So tender were they, he must have listened to their instruction as though it were coming from the closest of friends.

Years ago I served as a youth director in a small Baptist church in Oklahoma City. One of the Sunday School teachers had lost his temper in class and several of the class members had walked out, threatening to never come back again. I was in the pastor’s office as several deacons discussed with the pastor what he should do. One of the deacons said, “Pastor, you are just going to have to confront Brother McMillian about what he did in that Sunday School class. You’re just going to have to let him have it with both barrels.”

The pastor was a godly man and looked directly at the deacons and said, “Yes, I am going to have to confront Brother McMillian, but I’m going to have to wait a while to do it.”

“Why?” said the deacon. “Do it right now. Let him have it right now.”

“No, not now,” the pastor said. “I would enjoy it too much right now. I’m going to have to wait until I care enough to confront.”

What a great principle! Before you confront someone, make sure you care. Why is caring so important? Caring is the way of Jesus. A follower of Jesus Christ never seeks to hurt another, not intentionally. So gentle is Jesus that “a bruised reed he will not break, and a

smoldering wick he will not snuff out” (Matt. 12:20). Whenever it came to the feelings of others, Jesus was a master surgeon. The operative rule for the Great Physician was to do no harm.

If only we would follow the way of Jesus! In the first church I served there was a woman in the church who was teaching some really strange things. I let it go on for a while and then one day after church I chose to confront the lady in front of her friends. We argued for ten minutes or so. Fresh out of seminary I knew all the relevant passages and had the poor woman on the verge of tears before she turned to her car and started the ignition and drove off.

“Boy, I showed her,” I thought to myself as her friends slowly disbanded. Feeling a bit triumphant I drove home congratulating myself on my fine display of debating skill. I never saw that woman again. Tragically, I had forgotten that my ministry was to care for souls, not butcher them.

How easily Priscilla and Aquila could have driven Apollos away. They could have taken him to the theological woodshed. “How dare you preach that heresy stuff. What’s wrong with you? Are you some raving fundamentalist or something?” They could have embarrassed him that he didn’t know the baptism of Jesus. They could have driven Apollos right out of the ministry. Had Priscilla and Aquila not been so Christ-like they could have destroyed the life of a man who had surrendered himself to God. I wonder how many of God’s servants are not in ministry today because they were confronted by people who enjoyed it too much?

But preachers aren’t the only ones who are confronted less than graciously. Sons and daughters, husbands and wives are alienated from each other because they have been bruised and battered by one who enjoyed confronting just a little too much. Christian confrontation should never seek results where there are winners and losers. Christian confrontation seeks to heal, not hurt, to restore not destroy, to redeem, not condemn.

When confrontation is unavoidable first ask yourself, “What is my motivation in this confrontation? Am I seeking to prove a point or am I trying to deepen a relationship?”

Priscilla and Aquila provide a wonderful example of how confrontation should take place: They took Apollos unto them. They sought to nurture him, to encourage him, to commit themselves to his ministry. Confront only when you care enough to commit to the other person’s well being.

Confrontation isn’t a drive-by shooting where we target a victim and then fly past thinking that we have somehow accomplished God’s will. Christ-like confrontation should leave a person better off, not worse.

It all boils down to this: Confrontation is a privilege you have to earn. You earn the right to confront through love—you must care enough to take a person unto you.

A man came to my office to tell me that he was going to confront his wife about her drinking. Every night she would fall asleep in a drunken stupor and the man couldn’t take it anymore. He was going to confront his wife. We had prayer together. I told the distraught husband that I would check on him in a week or so. About ten days later I visited with him and I asked how things were going.

He indeed had confronted his wife. This is what he did: He told her that he loved her more than anything in the world. He told her he was giving up golf to spend weekends with her. He was willing to go to counseling with her to work on building their marriage. He promised her he would attend AA meetings with her the rest of their lives. He told her he would never abandon her.

Little wonder that the woman quit drinking and the relationship between these two people became a model of marriage in our church. Years later the woman told me just before I left that church to come here, “Pastor, I am so thankful that my husband loved me enough to confront me about my drinking.” In other words, the husband confronted his wife by taking her unto himself.

One last thought. Priscilla and Aquila confronted Apollos and “explained to him the way of God more adequately.” I’ve thought of that phrase some these past few days. I’ve turned it over again and again in my mind. How were they going to show Apollos the way of God unless they were following the way of God? Only those who follow Jesus may show others the way. Amen.