



Scoping out Apollos:

Nine Marks of a Healthy Christian

Most great pirate stories have one thing in common. At some point someone slides out their spyglass and focuses in on an unsuspecting person. His every movement can be seen in the black-bordered circular frame.

Figuratively speaking, the scriptures are a spyglass for the Christian. Paul even says, "*Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us*" (Phil. 3:17; ESV). The Greek word for "keep your eyes on" is the basis for our English word, "scope."

At the end of Acts 18 (vv. 24-28), Luke helps us set our scope on an Alexandrian Jew named Apollos. Apollos is presented as a "Philippians 3:17 man;" a man who walked according to the example of the first apostles. In Apollos we see a model of a healthy Christian.

As with most such models, the Bible is intentionally reserved biographically. After all, the point of Apollos' life was not to draw attention to himself but to Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).

We do know that Apollos was a Jewish believer from Alexandria, Egypt. At some point Apollos ministered in Ephesus where he was corrected by Aquila and Priscilla. Then, before Paul reached Ephesus, Apollos felt called to minister in Corinth, located across the Aegean Sea. Apollos built upon Paul's Corinthian ministry, watering the seed Paul planted (1 Cor. 3:6). He became a prominent preacher in Corinth to the point that he unintentionally developed a carnally loyal following (1 Cor. 3:4). He apparently also spent some time ministering with Titus on the Island of Crete (Titus 3:13).

So, what does Apollos teach us about a well-lived Christian life?

Believers Take Training Seriously

"*This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord*" (Acts 18:25). To use a form of the Greek word for "instructed," Apollos was catechized. Catechesis is systematic instruction by way of question and answer. This method, with the twelve articles of the Apostles' Creed forming the outline, was used by the early church to prepare converts to undergo the rite of baptism. Throughout the church's history believers and their children have been catechized in the basic truths of Christianity.

In addition to his religious education, we could assume that Apollos also took his secular training seriously. His hometown, Alexandria, was second to none in the area of education.

Of all the people that the Lord has used greatly in Scripture very few failed to learn this Proverb early in life: "*How much better to get wisdom than gold!*" (Prov. 16:16).

Believers Use Gifts for God's Glory

In Apollos' case, he was an eloquent man (v. 24). No doubt Apollos was trained in the science and art of elocution. Perhaps before his conversion Apollos was a lawyer. But undoubtedly when Apollos became converted he believed it only natural that he should use his mouth for God. Apollos knew that his ability to speak was a gift from God to be used for his glory.

You might not be eloquent. But you might be compassionate. You might be cheerful. You might have musical abilities. Your talents are a sacred trust from God to be used for the advancement of his name (Matt. 25:14-30).

Believers Study the Scriptures

Apollos was “*mighty in the Scriptures*” (v. 24). The picture this phrase kindles in our minds is one of a man wielding a sword with strength and skill (Cf. Eph. 6:17).

Are you mighty in the Scriptures? Do you know the story of redemption? Do you understand the place that each book has in the Bible? Are you committing Scripture to memory? There is no way to become mighty in the Scriptures other than through discipline. No Olympic gold-medalist or national spelling bee champion becomes mighty in their field without diligence. Aspiring bee-winners spend years of their lives meticulously studying the dictionary and word lists. That might sound obsessive but they have a drive to know the words. So did Apollos. Do we?

Believers Treat God’s Word Carefully

Apollos “*taught accurately the things of the Lord*” (v. 25). Apollos didn’t know everything. “*He knew only the baptism of John*” (v. 25). The sense we get is that Apollos taught what he knew, and no more.

We have a tendency to exaggerate our knowledge. The next time you are about to wax theological ask yourself, “Would I be willing to *publish* what I’m about to say? Would it hold up under public scrutiny?”

What one says with some degree of secret uncertainty, others may receive as gospel fact. Much damage is done by sloppy theologizing. The good news is, we don’t have to be expert theologians. We simply have to be faithful with what we know and press on toward greater knowledge.

Believers Are Courageous

Apollos spoke boldly in the Synagogues (v. 26). He “*vigorously refuted the Jews publicly...*” (v. 28). Apollos was not only eloquent but fervent (v. 25). Apollos took seriously Joshua’s charge to God’s people: “*Be bold and very courageous!*” (Josh. 1:7).

Ironically sometimes a bold example like Apollos’ can actually be *discouraging* when we face just how fearful we sometimes are. To not lose hope we need to understand that courage is relative. You may never be an Apollos or a Paul or a Joshua. But ask yourself, “What would be courageous *for me*? How could *I* be more bold for Jesus?”

Some of us excuse our timidity on the basis of ignorance or inexperience: “I don’t know Christianity inside and out so how could I be bold for the gospel?” Keep in mind that Apollos had an accurate *though limited* understanding of Christ. It is probable that you know more about Jesus than Apollos did! Timid Christians should memorize Hebrews 10:39: “*But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved*” (NIV).

Believers Are Teachable

Apollos’ understanding of Jesus was far from perfect. He only knew the baptism of John which looked with anticipation to Christ but didn’t look back on the fulfillment of Christ’s accomplished redemptive work. Remarkably, Apollos was happy to be corrected if it meant being brought into closer harmony with the truth (v. 26). What humility! The well-educated Alexandrian man was corrected by ordinary artisans, one of whom was a woman (a fact which might have made him uncomfortable).

So few of us are genuinely correctible. Most parents would agree that good children are correctable. But how easily we forget Jesus' words: *"Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Matt. 18:3).

Part of the reason for Apollos' receptivity to correction lay in the wisdom of Aquila and Priscilla. *"They took him **aside** and explained the way of God more accurately."* Private correction is almost always preferable to public rebuke. Employers, teachers, husbands, wives, and parents should take note: There are few things more demoralizing than public humiliation.

Believers Are Guided by the Spirit

When Luke says that Apollos was *"fervent in spirit"* (v. 25) more than anything he is probably highlighting the Holy Spirit's guidance in his life (Cf. Rom. 12:11). Apollos' bold obedience and scriptural convictions were Spirit-driven. Those who have been baptized into Christ through repentance and faith have the Holy Spirit within them. Far from teaching that believers need a secondary encounter with the Spirit after conversion, this text shows that those who have Christ also have his Spirit.

Believers Know Christ

Being a disciple is not first and foremost about doing things for God but about knowing Christ. Apollos could say with Paul, *"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death"* (Phil. 3:10). Apollos publicly showed from the *"Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ"* (v. 28) because he loved Jesus and knew the love of Jesus.

Each of us is a reporter. Loudly or quietly we talk about what we know and care about. It's no accident that Apollos talked about Jesus.

Believers Are Part of God's Plan

Above all, we see in Apollos the sovereign grace of God at work. Apollos is just one thread in the grand tapestry of the redemptive work God is weaving. So are you. In a manner of speaking, Apollos is just a blip on the Bible's radar screen. But as part of God's grand plan his life is infused with eternal meaning.

If you look around very carefully you'll notice hundreds of spyglasses zeroed in on YOU. That's a little scary. But isn't the prospect of being seen as a work of God's grace also exciting?

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