

Maturing in the Word

Acts 18:18-28

In 2016, the word “post-truth” was named word of the year by the Oxford Dictionary. It was that year when the word began popping up in articles about political movements in the United States and Europe. Six years later, a Gospel Coalition article said this about our post-truth world:

In a post-truth world, feelings trump facts, and personal subjectivity matters more than objective reality. Six years later, we’re swimming in post-truth cultural waters and trying, with increasing difficulty, to hold society together when even basic agreements over the nature of truth and reality become contested.

(<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/no-post-truth-world/>)

We ARE swimming in “post-truth cultural waters.” Basic agreements over the nature of truth are being contested. It is around us every day in our news, on our social media sites, and in many of our daily conversations. We hear it in statements like, “You have your truth and I have mine.” Truth is whatever your perspective is. People are trying to make their way through this life based on their own wisdom and yet God has spoken. He HAS revealed truth to us in the person of Jesus and through the Scriptures.

We have truth about the fundamental questions of life, right? The Scriptures reveal things like, what is ultimate reality? Who is God and what He like? What is the nature of mankind? What is sin? Where did we come from? What is our destiny? What is good? What it true? Where is hope found? Is there ultimate meaning found? Apart of Scripture we will not have sufficient answers to these questions. But we do have the Scriptures. God has spoken and He has revealed truth.

Jesus tells us that we will know the truth, and the truth will set [us] free (John 8:32). Jesus prayed that we would be sanctified in the truth and that God’s word is truth (John 17:17). He said that Spirit is the Spirit of truth and that He would guide us into all truth (John 16:13). Paul called the church the pillar and support of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15). And Paul also said this about truth in Ephesians 4:15:

¹⁵ Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

Paul’s point is that we need to be truth speakers to each other. As we do this we will grow up in Christ. In this post-truth world, we need each other. We need each other to speak the truth to each other so that we stay rooted and grounded in the truth. And the way we will do this best, is when we all seek to mature in the Word.

Today, we are looking at Acts 18:18-28. I want to make a few comments on the first few verses that cover the final part of Paul’s second missionary journey, but we will focus most of our attention on what Luke tells us about Apollos. He is an example of someone maturing in the word. And so, let’s look first at Paul’s journey to Antioch.

Paul: Journey to Antioch (vv. 18-23)

¹⁸ After this, Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow.

After the encounter with the Jews who tried to silence Paul that we looked at last week, Paul continues his ministry for some time in Corinth. But he eventually determines that it is time to head to Syria and the church in Antioch that had sent him out. And so he departs taking Priscilla and Aquila with him. These were the fellow tentmakers with whom Paul had stayed when he first arrived in Corinth.

Luke also gives us the interesting tidbit that Paul had his hair cut because he was *under a vow*. As a Jewish Christian, Paul continued to express his Christian faith in some of the Jewish forms. Jews made vows for such things as thankfulness to God for past blessings, or as part of a petition for future blessings. Paul ends this vow by cutting his hair, which would have then been presented in the temple in Jerusalem along with a sacrifice.

On the way to Syria, Paul stops in Ephesus.

¹⁹ And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews. ²⁰ When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. ²¹ But on taking leave of them he said, "I will return to you if God wills," and he set sail from Ephesus.

And so after a brief stay in Ephesus, Paul continues on his way with the understanding that if God wills it, he return. He leaves Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus and sets sail for Syria.

²² When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch.

Paul first greets the church in Jerusalem likely fulfilling his vow. Then he *went down to Antioch*. With this arrival in Antioch, Paul's second missionary journey is over. This time in Antioch was likely a time of reporting what God had been doing among the Gentiles. It was likely a time of being refreshed and encouraged and reconnected relationally to his sending church.

In verse 23, Paul begins his third missionary journey.

²³ After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

Paul returns to churches he has established so that he can strengthen *all the disciples*. He cared deeply about these churches. His focus wasn't just evangelism and reaching new areas. He

wanted to make sure there were churches in these places that were healthy, which could continue the work of proclaiming the gospel and making disciples of Jesus.

Eventually, Paul will make it back to Ephesus, but between his departure and return, a man named Apollos shows up and begins to preach there. This story about Apollos interrupts the focus on Paul and his ministry travels. I think Luke does this to introduce Apollo, who will become an important leader in the Corinthian church.

In these verses, we see how Apollos matured in the word. What we will see here is a great model for anyone who serves in a teaching role, but as I mentioned before, all of us are called to speak truth to each other and so there is a model here for all of us.

Apollos: Maturing in the Word (vv. 24-28)

²⁴ Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus.

Apollos was from Alexandria, which was a major city in the Roman empire located in Egypt. It eventually became the intellectual center of Christianity. Because most of the history we know regarding expansion of early Christianity is focused on its spread into Asia and Europe, we don't really know how or when the gospel came to Alexandria. In Acts 2, Luke mentions that there were Jews from Egypt present on the day of Pentecost and so possibly after the coming of the Spirit there were Jewish Christians who returned to Egypt with the gospel message.

Luke goes on to describe Apollos this way:

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.

Apollos was *competent in the Scriptures*. The NIV says that he had a "thorough knowledge of the Scriptures." When Apollos shows up in Ephesus, he has a solid grasp and understanding of flow, and the truths, and the message of the Old Testament Scriptures.

How does someone become competent in the Scriptures? Jesus said that as we seek to make disciples, we are to teach them everything He commanded. And so one part of becoming competent in the Scriptures is receiving instruction. We need to sit under good biblical teaching. Apollos had done this. He had been *instructed in the way of the Lord*. But without a doubt, Apollos had also invested time studying and reflecting on the Scriptures. He had worked hard at this. As a result, he is one who *spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus*.

Here's the point: **Maturing in the word comes from receiving instruction and doing the work of personally seeking to understand God's word.**

Oh, how we need people who are competent in the Scriptures in our day. We need people who can speak and teach accurately the things concerning Jesus in the church, in our homes, in our groups, or as friends meet. But this will only happen as we each seek to mature in the word. This is not just for those who stand up front; this is for all of us. In Colossians 3:16 Paul writes this to the church:

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Paul wants the word to dwell richly in the church and the only way that it can do that is if individually we are maturing in the word. But IF we are maturing, we will be able to teach and admonish one another in all wisdom. And so may we all work hard at maturing by receiving good teaching and by working hard to understand the word.

Now, Apollos is not only competent in the Scriptures, he was also gifted as a teacher. He is *eloquent*. He's a good communicator. He's persuasive. He is *fervent in spirit*, which can mean that he taught with passion. But this phrase can also be translated as "fervent in THE Spirit," which would emphasize that the Spirit had gifted him for this ministry.

Apollos is competent in the Scriptures. He is gifted as a teacher. But, Luke tells us, Apollos has a deficiency in his knowledge – *he knew only the baptism of John*. In other words, he didn't know about the baptism of the Spirit. He didn't know about Pentecost and the significance of the coming of the Spirit. Because of this some have thought that Apollos was not a Christian, but rather a faithful Jew looking forward to the hope of a coming Messiah. I think he was a believer, because he taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, which surely would have included his death and resurrection. He had accurate information about Jesus. He just didn't have the whole picture. There was need for growth.

How did he come to be a believer who knew nothing of the baptism of the Spirit? We simply don't know. What we know is that he taught accurately the things he did know, but he didn't know everything he needed to know.

²⁶ He began to speak 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.

Like Paul, Apollos goes to the *synagogue* to teach, and *Priscilla and Aquila* hear him. They become aware that he has some deficiency in his knowledge. And I love what they do. They don't interrupt him. They don't correct him in public. Rather with grace and gentleness they *took him aside*. It is possible that this expression has the sense of taking him into their home. They kindly sit down with him and explain *to him the way of God more accurately*. They teach him. They speak the truth in love to him. Was this done in one encounter? Did they meet with him many times? We don't know. What we do know is that God used this couple to help Apollos become an even better teacher. Their feedback was part of his maturing in the word.

So often people with Apollos' level of learning, skill, and gifting are not every teachable. So, often they think they have arrived. And yet that's not Apollos. He has a humble, teachable spirit. He allowed Priscilla and Aquilla to pour into his life and because of that he matured in the word and he became a better teacher.

Here's the point: **Maturing in the word comes from having a humble heart.** Maturing in the word comes from being teachable. No matter how long you've been a believer, no matter how much you've studied and learned about the word, you have not arrived. We are all still in process.

When it comes to the word, are you humble? Do you have the posture of knowing that you still have things to learn? Are you open to instruction and correction from others in the body of Christ, even people who might have less status and education and gifting than you? This is what Apollos models. Maturing in the word comes from having a humble heart.

This is a beautiful picture of the body of Christ at work as a gifted teacher receives instruction from these tentmaking-refugees from Rome. Certainly, it took humility on Apollos' part to receive this instruction, but they had to be willing to speak into Apollos' life. They could have thought, "We are tentmakers. Who are we to correct someone like Apollos?" But they didn't think that. They had been discipled by Paul and they saw deficiencies in Apollos' teaching, and they were willing to say something. They spoke the truth in love.

You may not have the same education or training that another in the body of Christ has. You may not have the same gifting. You may not be an upfront person. But you are needed. The body is to work together to build each other up. That's what we see here. Priscilla and Aquila understood some things Apollos did not. Without their courage to speak to Apollos, he would not have been as effective. Their hidden, private work with Apollos was vital.

The church needs these hidden encouragers. The church needs those who will gently correct. All of us who teach here at Faith welcome this. Some of you have played this role in my life. You've raised questions about something I've taught. You've offered a different perspective. You've given me insight into things I didn't know. This has been important for my maturing in the word.

Now, the next thing Luke tells us is that eventually Apollos feels called to go to Achaia.

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.

Achaia was the province where Corinth was located. One wonders if Priscilla and Aquila had shared with Apollos how the Jews had opposed Paul there. This is the place where the opposition had created fear in Paul. This is where Apollos wanted to go. And Luke tells us that this

gifted, powerful teacher, who is now more mature in the word, *greatly helped those who through grace had believed*. He did this by *powerfully refut[ing] the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus*.

Apollos matured in the word as a younger man as he received instruction in the way of the Lord. Apollos matured in the word through his own personal discipline and work to understand the Scriptures. Apollos matured in the word by being humble and teachable to the instruction of a couple in the church in Ephesus. And here's the thing, all of this was not just for him and his benefit, it was also for others. It was about the fruit it would bear in the lives of others.

And that's the point. **Maturing in the word bears fruit in the lives of others.**

Our maturing in the word is never just for us. It IS good for us. It WILL benefit us. But it is also for the fruit that it will bear in the lives of others. And here's the thing, if we are the kind of church where each is seeking to mature in the word and it is bearing fruit in the lives of others in the church, then we are going to be a stronger, more effective church in proclaiming truth and modeling lives transformed by truth to our post-truth culture. We will be able to articulate answers to the fundamental questions of life.

And so may we seek to mature in the word by receiving instruction. May we seek to mature in the word by personally seeking to understand God's word. Let's invite God to give us humble, teachable hearts that are always in the posture of knowing we have more to learn. May we become competent in the Scriptures in a way that it bears fruit in the lives of others.

As we come to the end of our time, I want to leave you with two questions to reflect on this week. First, ask yourself, "Am I maturing in the word?" Ask God about this. Reflect on if you are growing in the knowledge and application of God's word. Secondly, ask yourself, "What changes do I need to make to be someone who is maturing in the word?" One of the reasons we do life groups is to help people mature in the word. That might be the very thing you need to do this fall. But maybe it is developing the practice of daily time in the word. Maybe it is Scripture memory. Maybe there are distractions that you need to put away that are keeping you from time in the word. What one thing could you change that would make a world of difference in your maturing in the word.