DHMO Video

That’s kind of a silly video, and it’s meant to be. If you remember anything from science class you probably recognize that Dihydrogen Monoxide is just another name for H2O. There is a whole list of other things you could say about water that sound scary and threatening. It mutates DNA, denatures proteins, disrupts cell membranes. Thousands of people die each year from accidentally inhaling it. Being in contact with its solid form for too long causes tissue damage. That all sounds really silly when you know you’re talking about water. But when you don’t know everything you need to know, it’s easy to be deceived. It’s easy to believe things and even teach things that are untrue or incomplete.

In Acts 18 we see one of the most important figures of the early church learn that lesson, and he was taught by folks we met last week, Priscilla and Aquila.

**Acts 18:18–19 ESV — 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 (ken-cre-eye) he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow. **19** And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

Paul had been in Corinth for about a year and a half at this point, and he had worked with Priscilla and Aquila nearly the entire time. They had become close friends and colleagues, and partners in ministry. So when Paul left for Ephesus, they went with him. Corinth was never their home anyway, remember they were originally from Rome.

Paul was headed back to his sending church, the church in Antioch. His second missionary journey was coming to a close. Here in verse 18, we have this interesting statement that Paul cut his hair because he had taken a vow. This was probably the end of a Nazarite vow, like the one that Samson took. Jews would often take a Nazarite vow to set themselves apart for a time to either thank God for something he had blessed them with, or to ask God for future blessings. We don’t know when or why Paul began this vow, but it ended with cutting his hair here in Cenchreae (ken-cre-eye).

When they got to Ephesus, Paul immediately went into the synagogues, just as he always did. Luke uses the same word he has before, διαλέγομαι (dialegomai) to describe what Paul did in the synagogue. He taught and instructed, but also had a conversation and dialogue with the people there. The people there responded well.

**Acts 18:20–23 ESV — 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. **22** When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch. **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.

You know when you’re on vacation and you hit a certain point where you just know it’s time to go home? That’s where Paul was at. It was time to get back to his sending church, but he left Priscilla and Aquila there in Ephesus to make sure the church there had someone to guide them and help them get started.

Our English versions say that he spent some time in Antioch, and that is an accurate translation, but the word Luke uses here also means to make something, or do something, to accomplish something. When we are called God’s workmanship in Ephesians, Paul uses the same root word. Paul was not idle in Antioch. He didn’t kick back in the Lazy Boy and binge watch all the Netflix shows he had missed while he was gone. Paul was back home, but he was still actively doing ministry.

Then without much fanfare, we see him leave to go on his final missionary journey. Luke says he went from one place to the next. He was going in sequence, in order of the churches he had planted. The purpose of this trip wasn’t to start new churches, it was to strengthen and encourage the disciples in the churches he had already planted. The word Luke uses here means that he strengthened them or established them. He made sure they had a solid foundation. He made sure what they were teaching was on track, and that it hadn’t strayed from the truth. He strengthened their resolve to continue on.

Remember, these folks were people who had put their faith in Christ when Paul preached the Gospel to them for the first time. All the persecution Paul went through, all the struggles he had, he got to leave behind. These brand-new Christians in these churches stayed and lived in it. We talked last week about how Paul needed encouragement from others, the folks in these churches did as well. That’s what Paul was bringing to them.

While Paul was on this new journey strengthening the disciples, things were still happening back in Ephesus. Luke shifts the focus away from Paul for a bit so we can see what happened at Ephesus after he left.

**Acts 18:24–25 ESV — 24** Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. 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 a Jewish man from the city of Alexandria. Alexandria was a port city on the northwest coast of Egypt, founded and named by Alexander the Great. It was one of the most advanced cities of that time, with some incredible architectural and engineering feats. It was the greatest intellectual center in the whole Roman Empire with the largest library and one of the foremost schools in the ancient world. It was also the second largest city in the Roman Empire, second only to Rome itself.

Alexandria was an important city in the history of Christianity as well. It was the site of the most prestigious Christian school in the ancient world that was designed to prepare people for baptism. That was where Christian scholarship and new writing was happening. By the second century AD Alexandria was one of the most important cities of the Christian world, along with Rome and Antioch.

Alexandria was truly a metropolitan city, made up of all different ethnicities. There was also a large Jewish population there who had their own quarter of the city. There was Jewish scholarship happening in Alexandria as well. This is where most of the Septuagint was written, which is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament.

That was Apollos’ background. He grew up in a city full of people who were well educated and continued to pursue education. Apollos probably grew up going to some of the best schools in the world, and it showed in how he spoke.

Apollos was an eloquent speaker. The word Luke uses here is the word λόγιος (logios) which means someone who was well educated. This word meant that this person spoke with precision, elegance, force, and persuasion because of the study they had done. Have you ever known someone who you could tell was an educated person simply by the way they talked? They used words that you would have to look up in the dictionary to understand, and they weren’t being pretentious, it was just a part of their vocabulary? Someone who could convince you of almost anything because they were so persuasive and careful about how they spoke? That was Apollos.

My seminary advisor was like that. I distinctly remember the day of our orientation for the Seminary, I sat at a table with him for lunch, and I watched as he talked with four other students about the merits of our particular program and how it would help them in ministry. At the end our meal, we had four new students in our program.

Apollos seems to have had some natural abilities to speak in front of other people. He came off as polished, and professional where others might have seemed like amateurs. That was probably partly due to the education he received in Alexandria where he grew up. He was practiced, elegant, and sophisticated when he spoke.

More than that, Luke also says he was competent in the Scriptures. The word here is δυνατός (dynatos). That means Apollos was able and capable to handle Scripture as an expert. It also spoke of something that was powerful. That Greek word is where we get our word for dynamite today. Think of that kind of power.

When Apollos spoke, when he presented the Scriptures to people, it wasn’t just ho-hum. It was powerful. It had an effect on people not just because he was a great speaker and he had some education. Apollos knew Scripture well, and he used it well. His presentation of Scripture was powerful because of what he presented and how he did it.

This idea of being competent in the Scriptures is one we see back in the book of Ezra as well. **Ezra 7:6 ESV — 6** this Ezra went up from Babylonia. He was a scribe skilled in the Law of Moses that the Lord, the God of Israel, had given, and the king granted him all that he asked, for the hand of the Lord his God was on him.

Ezra used the ability and skill he had with Scripture to make sure he lived his life well, and to teach others to do the same. **Ezra 7:10 ESV — 10** For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the Lord, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.

That’s key here. Ezra’s view of Scripture made him able to live according to God’s laws, and able to teach them well to others. Apollos was doing the same thing. He was not only living by the word of God, he was also helping others understand how the Old Testament pointed the way to Jesus. This guy seemed like he was checking all the boxes, he was destined to be one of the stars of the Christian movement.

We don’t know how he was taught, or by whom. Perhaps he even learned about Jesus while he still lived in Alexandria. This was right around the time that Christianity was beginning to take a foothold in Alexandria that eventually became the epicenter of Christian learning in the ancient world.

Apollos was an eloquent speaker, he had the natural ability. He was smart enough and knew Scripture well enough to be doing exactly what Paul was doing in the synagogues all around. He was using Scripture to teach about Jesus. He was showing how the Old Testament Scriptures pointed the way to Jesus. But something was still missing.

If you were to put Paul and Apollos side by side and compare their speaking style, you would probably choose Apollos every time. By the way, that would probably be true of them physically as well. We don’t know what Apollos looked like, but a second century document called *The Acts of Paul* makes the claim that Paul was “small in size, bald-headed, bow-legged, well built, with eyebrows that met, rather long-nosed and full of grace”.

Paul wasn’t winning any beauty contests, and he probably wasn’t nearly as eloquent and polished as Apollos when he spoke. But Paul had something Apollos didn’t have. He had the knowledge of the full Gospel of Jesus. He had also received the Holy Spirit. Apollos apparently had never heard of Jesus’ command to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Nor had he heard of Peter’s teaching on the day of Pentecost that we receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior and are baptized.

Apollos only knew John’s baptism. John’s baptism was an outward sign of repentance for the people who heard John’s message. Baptism in the name of Jesus is much more than that. For starters, Paul tells us in Romans 6 that baptism connects us with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. We die to sin in that moment, and are raised to a new life with Christ. Then Peter tells us in Acts 2.38 that when we repent and are baptized we receive forgiveness for our sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

If you’ve been with us for our series in Acts up to this point, then hopefully you can see that the Holy Spirit is vital in the lives of believers. The Holy Spirit leads and guides us. He helps us to make right decisions, convicts us of sin, and sometimes even prevents us from going places and doing things that God doesn’t have planned for us. The Holy Spirit gives believers in Jesus the ability and the boldness to do and say things that we wouldn’t otherwise. He gives us the spiritual gifts that we need to live a godly life and to do the ministry God has called each one of us to, and he is our intercessor, always advocating and interceding on our behalf.

Some might look at Apollos and think he was doing pretty good, why not just leave him be. He got most of it right, why bother with this one aspect of the Gospel that he didn’t know yet. The problem is that this is a vitally important part of the Gospel. Take the Holy Spirit out of the lives of believers, and you have just crippled them and made them unable to live as a follower of Jesus, unable to do ministry for the sake of the Gospel. Priscilla and Aquila recognized that immediately, and they did something about it.

**Acts 18:26–28 ESV — 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. **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.

Priscilla and Aquila had spent a lot of time with Paul, and they knew the doctrine of the Gospel well. They knew they had to do something about what was going on, but they were careful about how they did it. The word Luke uses here means to lead someone away from the group. They didn’t want to heckle him, they didn’t want to make him look like a fool. They needed to address the issue, but they were gracious about it.

They took him aside and explained the way of God more accurately to him. They clarified the things he didn’t know yet. They had a conversation with him, and they made it clear what he was missing and why it was important. Apollos accepted their instruction and correction just as graciously as they gave it.

After that, Apollos was ready to move on to other places so he could help them learn. Now he had the excellent and practiced speaking skills, and the full knowledge of the Gospel. Some people might be gun shy, thinking that this guy who had just been teaching the wrong thing ought to be on probation for a while before he took off on his own. But that’s not what happened. The disciples in Ephesus encouraged him. They wrote to the other churches to let them know he was coming and to welcome him when he did. Apollos went out from there to be very effective and successful in ministry because he finally had solid doctrine. He finally knew the full Gospel, and could go out and teach others.

So why does our theology and our doctrine matter so much? We know why the Holy Spirit matters and why Apollos needed to know and teach about Baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What about everything else?

What we believe matters so much because what we believe affects everything about our lives. What we believe about who God is and what he’s like, how he interacts with us, and what he expects of us affects how we live every day. Paul is adamant that we stick to the true Gospel, that we don’t deviate from it, and that we don’t add anything to it, or take anything away from it. Because he knew that there would be dire consequences for the church if we started to teach something contrary to the Gospel of Jesus.

Joshua Harris wrote a book called *Dug Down Deep*. This is what he has to say about the importance of theology.

“I’ve come to learn that theology matters. And it matters not because we want a good grade on a test, but because what we know about God shapes the way we think and live. What you believe about God’s nature – what he is like, what he wants from you, and whether or not you answer to him affects every part of your life. Theology matters because if we get it wrong, then our whole life will be wrong. I know the idea of studying God often rubs people the wrong way. It sounds cold and theoretical, as if God were a frog carcass to dissect in the lab, or a set of ideas that we memorize like math proofs. But studying God doesn’t have to be like that. You can study him the way you study a sunset that leaves you speechless. You can study him the way a man studies the wife he passionately loves. Does anyone fault him for noting her every like and dislike? Is it clinical for him to desire to know the thoughts and longings of her heart or to want to hear her speak? Knowledge doesn’t have to be dry and lifeless. And when you think about it, exactly what is our alternative? Ignorance? Falsehood? We’re either building our lives on the reality of what God is truly like and what he’s about, or we’re basing our lives on our own imagination and misconceptions. We’re all theologians. The question is whether what we know about God is true.”

So how do we make sure that what we know about God is true? How do we make sure our doctrine is solid? I think we can pull four things from Acts 18 that will help us with that.

1. First, we have to become competent in the Scriptures

Apollos was faithful to act boldly on what he knew of Scripture, and he was competent in the Old Testament Scriptures. He was using what he knew, and using his abilities to spread the good news about Jesus Christ. Remember, the Gospels weren’t written yet, the New Testament didn’t exist yet in its current form. They were relying on oral teachings and letters to teach the Gospel at this point.

Apollos was faithful with what he knew, there were just some things that he didn’t know yet. But Apollos had put in the effort to become competent in the Scriptures he did have. He had studied the Bible, he was able to teach from Scripture, and he was even able to show people how the Old Testament Scriptures proved that Jesus was the Messiah.

To become competent in the Scripture first means you have to read Scripture, but more than that you have to study it. You have to know how to interpret it, know how to handle it. Learning to do that takes hard work and it takes commitment. But if we are going to live our lives as followers of Jesus, we have to become students of his word.

1. We have to keep each other accountable

Priscilla and Aquila recognized the hole in Apollos’ theology and they made sure they did something about it. But they went about it in the right way.

They didn’t complain on Facebook, they didn’t leave the church, they didn’t hold up signs to protest, and they weren’t hostile. They didn’t call for Apollos to step down because obviously he didn’t know what he was doing. They could see Apollos’ potential as an effective leader if he just had someone to teach him what he needed to know. So they became those people.

They quietly took him aside and taught him what he needed to know to be teaching the full Gospel of Jesus. Luke tells us they were careful and precise about how they did it. They wanted to make sure that Apollos didn’t have any more gaps in his understanding of the Gospel. They also made sure that they didn’t do it in a way that hurt Apollos. They weren’t there to be critical of him, they were there to help him. They wanted him to be a successful and faithful part of the Kingdom of God.

They also weren’t afraid to step up and actually do something. So many people hear something that’s not right and they just move on without saying anything, without correcting the problem. If we’re going to keep each other accountable to having solid doctrine, we need to be willing to do what Priscilla and Aquila did here. We need to be willing to correct wrong doctrine, but always do it with grace.

1. We have to stay humble

If Apollos reacted to Priscilla and Aquila the way that people in our culture do today, the church in Ephesus would have split, and they never would have had anything to do with each other again. When someone calls what we believe into question, it can throw us into defense mode in a heartbeat. But let me ask you a question? Is there anyone here today who thinks they have everything figured out and have nothing else to learn about the Bible or your faith? I sincerely hope the answer is no. All of us have more to learn. That’s a lifelong process.

You know what happens when you go to Bible college or Seminary? The more you learn and the further you go, the more you learn how much you don’t know yet. If we keep a humble attitude about what we think we know, then there will always be room for God to teach us more.

Think about what Paul went through for a minute. He had one of the most prestigious educations in the Jewish world. He had studied to be a Pharisee under Gamaliel, one of the more sought-after rabbis at that time. As much as Paul learned, as much as he was respected by the Jews, as much as he thought he knew, he totally missed the most important part. He missed that Jesus was the Messiah.

If a guy like Paul could miss something like that, even with as much as he studied the Scriptures, it could happen to anyone. Any of us could be missing an important element of our faith. Any of us could have a belief that’s not Scriptural. If we are going to correct those things, we have to remain teachable. If we are going to remain teachable we have to stay humble.

1. We have to rely on the Holy Spirit

When we’re trying to make sure that we have our doctrine right and that we’re interpreting Scripture correctly, we need to make sure we’re relying on the right person. No matter how much you study the Bible, no matter how intelligent you are, that person is not you. We who have put our faith in Jesus Christ and been baptized in his name have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit to be with us at all times. He is who we rely on to keep us on solid ground.

The Holy Spirit was sent to be our helper, and one of the things he helps us do is make sense of what we read in the Bible. **1 John 2:27 NLT — 27** But you have received the Holy Spirit, and he lives within you, so you don’t need anyone to teach you what is true. For the Spirit teaches you everything you need to know, and what he teaches is true—it is not a lie. So just as he has taught you, remain in fellowship with Christ.

Now this does not mean that we don’t need people to teach us, all of us need that. John was writing in his letter about false teachers who were preying on the churches he wrote to. What the Holy Spirit does is help us know what is true, and what is not. He helps us to have discernment about how we handle what we hear. He helps us to apply Scripture to the situations we find ourselves in every day. He is the one that leads us and guides us to have the solid doctrine we need to live our lives for Jesus.

Once we have that solid doctrine then we can go out and teach others, encourage others, and help others get closer to Jesus, just like Priscilla and Aquila, and just like Apollos. Once we have that solid foundation to stand on, God can use us to do mighty things for his Kingdom, and he gets all the glory for that.