



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Articles

## APOLLOS MEETS ATHENS

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Concerned over the influence of Greek philosophy on some believers, second century church leader Tertullian rhetorically asked, “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” (*On Prescription Against Heretics* 7). His question reminds us of the possibility and danger of being more influenced by our world’s accepted wisdom than by “the wisdom from above” (cf. James 3:17, ESV).

Valuable as his point is, it contains a potential pitfall. We can become so concerned to protect ourselves from secular “Athens” that we never engage with it. Two texts from Acts, studied side-by-side, point to a better way.

In Acts 18:24-28, we meet “a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria,” Egypt. Arriving in Ephesus, he showed himself to be “eloquent” and “competent in the [Old Testament] Scriptures.” These descriptions suggest something about both his religious training and cultural background (Alexandria was a major education center). But, his understanding of “the things concerning Jesus” was lacking. Priscilla and Aquila taught him, helping him complete the relatively short journey from knowing only John’s baptism to accurately understanding the way of Jesus.

In Acts 17:16-31, Paul arrived in Athens. He found a synagogue, but mostly he encountered what we today would call intellectual pluralism. He preached “Jesus and the resurrection,” and got an invitation to address the philosophers on the Areopagus. Some mocked and others withheld judgment. But, some became believers.

As those called to testify concerning the record of Jesus’ life in this time and place, we should consider what it means that God’s word includes both stories.

Many in our world are “Apolloses.” They read the Bible, believe in Jesus and worship God in churches. Compared to many of their neighbors, they are “not far from the kingdom” (cf. Mark 12:34). They need to learn “the way of God more accurately.” We who know that way should look for opportunities to show them.

But, we also live among many “Athenians.” Some have a smattering knowledge of the Christian faith while others know only that churches sit on many of their town’s street corners. But, some in both groups show an interest in spiritual things.

If Acts 17 teaches anything, it is that we who know Jesus must not be so focused on the Apolloses that we ignore their Athenian neighbors.

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