

Acts 18:23

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Throughout history there have been many eloquent speakers and this morning we will look at 2 of best.

The first great speaker was of course was the apostle Paul. Last time we were together, the apostle Paul had ended his secondary missionary journey after nearly 3 years of ministry. He returned to Antioch but soon left on another journey. The third missionary journey begins in Acts 18 verse 23.

23 And having spent some time there (in Antioch), he (Paul) left and passed successively through the Galatian region and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

You will remember that his last stop during the 2nd journey was in Ephesus. And Paul promised to return there again. So he travels to Ephesus by way of the Galatian region and passes through Phrygia strengthening the believers there but ultimately arrives in Ephesus.

In Ephesus we find our second eloquent speaker. His name was Apollos. Look at verse 24.

24 Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. 25 This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; 26 and he began to speak out 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.

You will remember Aquila and Priscilla from our last lesson. They too were in the tent making business and they befriended Paul in Corinth

at one of his lowest points. They became believers, were discipled by Paul and from the writings of Paul, we know they became very close friends.

Beginning in verse 24, we are told several things about Apollos. First he came from Alexandria, (just a few miles from here.)

Second, he was an eloquent speaker, he was sincere, he was mighty in the Scriptures and he had been instructed in the Way of the Lord.

Third we are told that he was teaching boldly in the synagogue in Ephesus. But there was a problem. What was it?

So what do you do when you come across a sincere person who happens to be teaching something that is doctrinally false?

We will come back to this question in a few minutes. But first, notice that Aquila and Priscilla, having been taught by Paul heard Apollos' teaching, recognized that something was wrong and notice what they did. Verse 26 says, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

The scripture indicates that they reached out to Apollos and very tactfully explained the truth to him. Tact is something that is rare in our world.

We'll, Aquila and Priscilla were tactful people and Apollos was a quick learner. Notice that not only did he not take offense to their correction; he went out and taught what he had learned from them. Look at verse 27.

27 And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace, 28 for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.

Just as Paul had taught Aquila and Priscilla and then released them to teach others, so Aquila and Priscilla taught Apollos who went out and taught others.

From Ephesus, Apollos went to Achaia, where he continued in the persistent effort of evangelism and discipleship.

So does this little story have to do with our lives? That will become clear as we look at chapter 19. Keep in mind the tactful way that Aquila and Priscilla corrected Apollos. We'll come back to that in a few minutes.

Would you say the book of Acts is more of a book of history or a book of doctrine? Or is it both? Why?

I believe that the book of Acts was meant to be an historical book. It is the bridge between the gospels which told about the acts of Jesus and the epistles which teach the doctrines of the church.

The book of Acts represents a time of transition. It spans 30 years, from Christ's ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit to Paul's imprisonment in Rome. Virtually everything at this time was in a state of flux; great changes were occurring.

At the beginning of the book, Christ had not yet ascended and areas of church doctrine had not been established. The gospel message was almost exclusively Jewish, and the believers met in synagogues on Saturdays to worship. By the end of the book, though, Gentiles comprised a substantial portion of the Church and worship took place on Sundays in small assemblies.

The beginning of Acts emphasized the baptism of repentance – John's baptism – and many were baptized into this. But as the message of Christ's death and resurrection spread, many of these people realized the incompleteness of the message which they had heard and they were made complete through belief and faith in Christ's completed work at Calvary.

So Acts is the bridge. Can you imagine if there were no bridges over the Potomac River?

Think about what would happen if someone would decide to park their car on one of the bridges over the Potomac. What would be the result?

So if you decide to base your doctrinal beliefs on specific actions that took place in the book of Acts, what is likely to occur?

The first 7 verses of Chapter 19 of the Book of Acts has been on of the most contentious verses in the past century. As we go through it and try to interpret it correctly, let's keep in mind that:

- Acts is a transitional book – a bridge if you will
- Basing your doctrine on a bridge is risky
- When people are wrong we need to correct their error with tact

With that in mind, let look at verse 1.

1 It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. 2 He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."

If you read verse 2 literally, you might come to the conclusion that there are 2 steps with respect to salvation. Step 1 is faith, and step 2 is receiving the Holy Spirit. There are many churches today that call this second step, the "Second Blessing." The first blessing, they believe is when you get saved and the 2nd is receiving the Spirit.

I am aware that there are very solid Christian people who believe this. And out of context, I would have to say that is exactly what the verses say. And if you park on the bridge of the Book of Acts, that would be your conclusion as well.

There are many verses that if taken out of context, might lead you to a false theology. Let me give you a few examples.

Num 31:17-19

17 Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man intimately. 18 But all the girls who have not known man intimately spare for yourselves.

Out of context, what would that verse be telling us?

Acts 2:38-39

38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Out of context, what would that verse be telling us?

Ps 91:4

4 He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge; His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

That verse tells us that God is a chicken.

So the only way to interpret the Bible properly is to compare scripture with scripture. And we let the clear verses interpret the fuzzy ones. Otherwise, our doctrine can look very strange.

Let's look again at the verses and see if we can interpret them in the context of the entire Word of God. Look at verse 1 again.

1 It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. 2 He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said to him, "No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."

Paul would appear to be asking a strange question. Today, based on many verses of scripture, it seems clear that at the moment of salvation, the believer receives the gift of the Holy Spirit. Here are a few very clear verses.

Rom 8:9 says,

9 However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.

Eph 1:13 says,

13 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation — having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit...

In Gal 3:2 Paul asks,

2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

If not for the work of the Holy Spirit, we can not be saved. He regenerates, He quickens our dead spirits, and He seals us.

It was not always the case that the Holy Spirit indwelt every believer all the time. It appears from the Old Testament scriptures that He came and left. David prayed in Ps 51:11,

11 Do not cast me away from Your presence and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. 12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and sustain me with a willing spirit.

Let's be clear on the process of salvation. It is the Holy Spirit that convicts us of our sins. It is the Holy Spirit who indwells us at the moment of our salvation and it is the Holy Spirit that seals our salvation for eternity.

1 Cor 3:16 tells us that our bodies are the Temple of God.

16 Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

At the moment of Salvation we get all of the Holy Spirit that is possible to get. That is a once and for always action.

The term "Filled with the Spirit", mentioned many times throughout the New Testament and discussed many times during the course of this study is us turning over control of our bodies to the Holy Spirit. Filling is a daily occurrence. Some days you only give Him a toe and other days you turn over your entire hands, heart and head.

Now there is much controversy over what the spiritual condition of the men in Acts 19 actually was. Were they saved or not?

They are called disciples but that doesn't mean they were ever saved. It means that they were followers of someone. They may have been on their way to being saved, but when Paul came upon them, he discerned that they were not yet saved.

Notice verse 3.

3 And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" And they said, "Into John's baptism."

They must have followed John the Baptist and heard of the need to repent for the King was coming, but they hadn't heard of Jesus Christ and His death on the cross for the forgiveness of their sins.

So Paul taught them. Notice Paul's focus is on Jesus. Verse 4.

4 Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus." The Holy Spirit does not want to be the center of attention. The work of the Holy Spirit is to point the way to Jesus Christ. Making the Holy Spirit the central person in the trinity is a mistake. The Church is built on Jesus Christ. He is the cornerstone. Not the Holy Spirit.

It is in verse 5 that these men get saved. Look at verse 5.

5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

And now the most controversial part of the book of Acts. Verse 6.

6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. 7 There were in all about twelve men.

In the book of Acts, there are 4 mentions of a Pentecost type of event. The first time was at Pentecost when the Jews received the Holy Spirit in Acts 2.

Turn to Acts 2 verse 1.

1 When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

The second time it happened was when the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit in Acts 8:14.

14 Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John, 15 who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. 16 For He had not yet fallen upon any of them; they had simply been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then they began laying their hands on them, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit.

The third event occurred when the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit in Acts 10:44.

44 While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who were listening to the message. 45 All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. 46 For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God.

First to the Jews, then the Samaritans, then to the Gentiles, the Holy Spirit fell on each group. But who do these 12 men in Acts 19 represent?

No one knows. It is a mystery. And a large number of believers have parked on this bridge verse to say that each of us will receive a second blessing and the evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit is that each person will speak in tongues.

Why would an entire movement make so much out of what happened to twelve men and was never used as a norm for practice or even mentioned again in the New Testament?

So let's suppose that those who believe in the second blessing are wrong. Remember I said we would come back to the way Aquila and Priscilla handled the false teaching of Apollos? How should what I believe is the false teaching of the Pentecostal Church be handled?

My answer is with love and tact. That is how Aquila and Priscilla handled it. I think it is interesting that God put the story of Apollos in the juxtaposition of the 12 men who received the Holy Spirit in Acts 19.

It is essential that our salvation is based on Jesus Christ's death and resurrection and it is essential that whatever evidence follows salvation, it must be just as much from God.

In Acts 19 Paul asks 5 questions:

1. What Baptism did you receive? (1-7)
2. What Message did you receive? (8-10)
3. What Gift did you receive? (11-12)
4. What Jesus did you receive? (13-20)
5. What Reception did you receive? (21-41)

This morning we dealt with only one of the questions and next week we will deal with the other 4.