

**Acts 18: 24 – 19: 7; “Hearing of the Holy Spirit”, Sermon # 68 in the series –
“Laying the Foundations”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
November 7th, 2021, in the Morning Worship Service.**

We have here a section of Scripture which very clearly shows us that believers, if they have truly believed in the Lord Jesus Christ with saving faith, they will sometimes be lacking in their understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. I believe that these two episodes are placed together, here in the book of Acts, to show us some things about how the Lord, the Holy Spirit worked in those days. They are here for us to read and to learn from today as well. Even though we don't live in the times where revelatory gifts are given to us, still the Spirit does illumine the understanding of believers to better and better perceive the truth of doctrine, if they are teachable.

The Church is the body of Christ, and God has placed the members of the body in the positions that He would have them. Even though we do not have apostles in the Church today, we do have pastor-teachers. And we also have other gifted brethren like Aquila and Priscilla, who can help us understand God's word better, and minister to us in private. In this way, being helped by both the Spirit, and by godly men and women, we will be able to serve Christ better. As you hear this message, I hope that you will come to better understand the working and way of the Holy Spirit with you, the believer.

1st of all – Let me explain to you how the Lord, the Holy Spirit, used Aquila and Priscilla to help Apollos to understand the Way of God more accurately.

In verse 24 we are told that a certain Jew named Apollos came to Ephesus, desiring to preach and teach people, the gospel. It says that he was born at Alexandria, and he was an eloquent man. And what is even more significant, it says that he was mighty in the Scriptures. There is no greater commendation which can be given to any preacher than that he is mighty in the Scriptures. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. And how shall they hear without a preacher? Also, we see from the way that it is worded here, that the qualities, the gifts and the abilities of the man who preaches that gospel are very important as well. He was eloquent in his speech and he was also, it says, fervent in spirit.

But Apollos was mighty in his understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures, especially the prophecies concerning the Messiah. What was wonderful was, that he had at some point been instructed in the way of the Lord (that is – in the way of the Lord Jesus being the only Savior of sinners). It appears that this instruction began when he went to hear John the Baptist preach at some point, as a young person. He listened to John preach, that God had sent Christ into the world to be the Lamb of God that would take away the sin of the world. He had believed in John's message of Christ and he repented of all of his sins. He believed in the Christ who John preached. He believed in our Lord who was baptized in the river Jordan by John.

In the years following this, he searched the Scriptures to find out all that He could about Christ. John had said that the Father had sent His only-begotten Son into the world, and that Christ revealed the Father to people who believed in Him. He said that the only-begotten God who is the bosom of the Father, He has revealed Him. Apollos, in his studies of the Scriptures found that Christ was the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures. He had heard that the Lord Jesus was born at Bethlehem. He saw that this was the fulfillment of Micah 5: 2 – “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.”

He had probably often heard the many prophecies in the book of Isaiah such as Isaiah 9: 6 – “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder.” “And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty god, Everlasting Father,

Prince of Peace.” “Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever.” “The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” He often thought about the greatness and the glory of Christ’s kingdom and how it would progress, over time, to the Gentiles, and to the ends of the earth.

He had probably heard Isaiah 49: 5 and 6 read, where it says – “And now the Lord says, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, to bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel is gathered to Him (For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and My God shall be My strength), Indeed he says, ‘It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.’”

I am saying that Apollos had probably known these things for a long time before he ever came to Ephesus. And since he had the natural gifts and abilities that He he did, and the Holy Spirit was reinforcing all of these truths to his mind and heart, he finally came to the conclusion that he was being called by God to preach the gospel. Yes, he was born in Alexandria, but somehow, at some point, he had come to Jerusalem, and had he heard John the Baptist preach and had been baptized by him. Perhaps it was his parents who had brought him to Jerusalem. How important it is that parents bring their children to hear the word preached. And now, for Apollos, it was some 25 years later when he came to Ephesus wanting to preach.

When he heard John preach it was before Jesus went to the cross. And it was before Christ’s death and resurrection took place. But he was baptized there in the river Jordan, and then he evidently returned to Alexandria. Neither he, nor his parents, personally witnessed anything of the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus. But what I want you to see, is that Apollos did believe in the Christ whom John preached, and he was saved at that time. At no point in this passage does it say that Apollos was not a believer in Christ when he came to Ephesus. Indeed, there is every indication that he was.

For it says in verse 25, that not only had he been instructed in the way of the Lord; that is, in the way of salvation by faith in Christ alone, but when he taught the people that he preached to, he taught them accurately about the things of the Lord. Even though he knew only the baptism of John, he could do this. He wanted to do this. He believed that he was called and raised up to do this. And you and I should understand that since he had been baptized by John before, it was not necessary now that he be baptized with the further, more developed, believer’s baptism which would come later, because John’s baptism was sufficient. John’s baptism was sufficient because it was looking forward to all that Christ would do and accomplish by His righteous life, His death, and His resurrection.

Yes, it is true that our Lord Jesus Christ added some more, very important words to what John said after He was raised from the dead. He said that the apostles and pastor-teachers of churches should baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit. This is the complete baptistic formulation for the entire rest of the Church age. But John’s baptism we should understand was believer’s baptism for that particular time, and those particular people of the Jews, right before Christ came and fulfilled His ministry, and purchased the whole Church with His blood. John’s baptism was sufficient to identify any person receiving it, as one who had faith in Christ.

We know this because he would have been instructed by Aquila and Priscilla to be baptized at that time, after they talked to him, and explained to him the Way of God more accurately, if it had been necessary. But, he had already believed in Christ long before this. He was a saved man with a ministry, when he came to Ephesus. And although he knew only the baptism of John; that is the water baptism of John, He knew the Lord. He had believed the gospel. And he was at that time also spiritually baptized into Christ as all Old Testament believers were. That is,

like any Old Testament believer, he was united together in the likeness of His death, by faith in what Christ would do for him in the future, when He came and fulfilled His earthly ministry; fulfilling all righteousness and becoming the propitiation for our sins. When he came to Ephesus, he came as a man with a gift and a ministry already given to Him by the risen Christ. He simply needed to have some important things explained to him about the Holy Spirit's working, and the Church.

This is where Priscilla and Aquila come in. When Apollos spoke boldly in the synagogue at Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla were there listening. And when they heard him, they knew what they had to do. They had sat under the apostle Paul's teaching for some time, and so they were well equipped to be able to instruct Apollos on the things that he needed to learn, in order to be a better preacher of the gospel and God's word. If Apollos only knew the baptism of John, he would only be able to preach what he knew; that is, repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, in an elementary fashion.

But he didn't really know anything about how Christ's finished work of righteousness and sufferings were the basis of all of the believer's sanctification, and glorification. He did not know about the giving of the Spirit to the Church on the Day of Pentecost, and what this meant for a man who wanted to be a minister. The Baptism with the Holy Spirit would mean being given the Holy Spirit's power to see certain tangible results. He did not know apostolic doctrine yet, and specifically those doctrines which were so vital to living the Christian life in relation to Christ's people, His Church. He did not know about the doctrines of God's grace; how it is that all men are totally depraved by nature, and that they must be raised from their spiritual death in trespasses and sins. They must be made spiritually alive in the New Birth, and to know the reality of the Spirit's working in their life, following their conversion to Christ.

He knew nothing of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit's New Testament ministry; how He was given to the Church, and to each individual believer in it, so that they might learn Christ and grow up into Christ. He knew nothing about the Church as being the body of Christ, or the Spirit's ministry of placing men in the body of Christ. He knew nothing of the meaning of Christ's ascension to the right hand of the Father, and His ministry of Intercession for all of God's saints. He did not know about Christ's breaking down the barrier between Jew and Gentile, and His making them one New Man in the Church. He did not know these mysteries.

But Apollos was a saved man, and he had the Holy Spirit in his life. And the Spirit had Aquila and Priscilla help him in understanding the things that he needed to understand. He needed to learn much more to be a doctrinally correct preacher of the word. The word of God, at this point in Church History, was not only the Old Testament Scriptures, but it was also becoming the New Testament Scriptures; that is, the apostle's words and doctrine. Because they had spent so much time with the apostle Paul, Aquila and Priscilla were the perfect instructors for Apollos at this point. They took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

And after they had done this, and he had received their instruction to him with real meekness, they didn't have any problem accepting the fact that he desired to get on with his ministry which the Lord had given him. When Apollos desired to take a trip to Achaia, the brethren of the church there at Ephesus wrote him a letter of commendation that the church at Corinth should receive him. And when he arrived there, it says in verse 27, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace." This is wonderful, is it not? For it says in verse 28 that he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scripture that Jesus was the Christ. He just kept right on, with the work that the Lord had already called him to do. But now he had had his doctrinal knowledge brought up to speed.

Just a couple of things I want you to take notice of. It is Christ who gives gifts to men. This man Apollos had been given a great preaching and teaching gift. He was not an apostle, he was

not a prophet, he was not an evangelist as far we know. He was simply a man with a great gift of preaching and teaching who needed some help so that his ministry might be doctrinally more correct; that he might doctrinally understand the ministry of the Holy Spirit to the Church and to individual believers better. The Holy Spirit mightily used Aquila and Priscilla for this purpose. And Apollos humbly received their teaching. And this is how it should be in the body of Christ today, as well; each of us using our gift to help other believers understand more about Christ, and more about the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

By the way, as a side note, it does appear that Priscilla was helping Aquila out in this time of instructing Apollos more accurately concerning the way of God. John Gill says – “These two doubtless had received a considerable measure of evangelical light and knowledge from the Apostle Paul, during the time of their conversation with him; and as they freely received from him, they freely imparted it to Apollos, with a good design to spread the truth of the Gospel, and to promote it, and the interest of Christ in the world. And as on the one hand it was a good office, and a kind part in them, to communicate knowledge to him, so it was an instance of a good spirit, and of condescension in him, to be taught and instructed by them; especially since one of them was a woman, and both mechanics, (tentmakers) and they made but a mean figure. And from hence, he says, it may be observed, that women of grace, knowledge, and experience, though they are not allowed to teach in public, yet they may, and ought to communicate in private, what they know of divine things, for the use of others.” (end of quote)

This kind of interpersonal ministry of believers instructing one another, is what it means when Paul says in Romans 15: 14 – “Now I myself am confident that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.” He is saying that believers can help each other immensely, if they will only use their gift in the right way. If they impart knowledge in the right way to their fellow-believers, they will be able to complete what is lacking in their faith. That is, when you learn to help other believers in their understanding of spiritual truth and doctrine, they will come to have a better and better understanding of how Christ would have them to live and to labor for Him.

The great object of our Christian life is to learn Christ, and since this is the case, then to grow in our understanding of how we can personally minister grace to one another in word and deed is a most important thing. Let us be those who seek to do that very thing and the grace of God will be spreading to more and more people. Christ’s word will run swiftly and be glorified.

2nd – I want to show you how the Lord, the Spirit, used the apostle Paul to help these brethren at Ephesus to understand that there was a Holy Spirit.

Chapter 19, verse 1 says – “And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus.” “And finding some disciples he said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’” So they said to him, ‘We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit.’” “And he said to them, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’” “So they said, ‘Into John’s baptism.’” “Then Paul said, ‘John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is on Christ Jesus.’” “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” “And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.” “Now the men were about twelve in all.”

Once again we encounter a situation where the baptism of John was all that these men were acquainted with. In this case, Paul wanted to know whether these “disciples”, as they are called, had received the Holy Spirit when they believed. They respond by saying that they had not so much as heard whether there was a Holy Spirit. This answer tells us how much these men needed to learn about Person of the Holy Spirit, as One of the Divine Trinity; a very essential truth in order to understand that you are an orthodox Christian. It is not only important that a believer in Christ confesses that they have repented of their sins and believed in the Lord Jesus

Christ, but is essential to their understanding of the whole Christian faith and life that they come to understand the experiential nature of the Holy Spirit's work. It appears that these 12 men were disciples of John, and they had believed him when he preached to them that they needed to repent of their sins. We see from the apostle Paul's answer to them in verse 4, that he perceived that even though they had begun well by believing in John's word to them that they must repent of their sins, they had not at all come to know the ministry of the Holy Spirit in their hearts, baptizing them into Christ, and His sealing them as the guarantee of their inheritance. The Spirit had never borne witness with their spirit that they were children of God.

In this transitional time of the Church from Old Testament Judaism to the New Testament revelation of all that Christ came to do and to bring to His Church in the sending and giving of the Holy Spirit, this kind of situation is understandable. The ignorance of these men concerning the Holy Spirit and His blessed work is understandable. Very simply, these men who were disciples of John needed to become disciples of Jesus. Paul said to them in verse 4 – "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus." And so, when they heard that, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And Paul also laid hands on them, it says in verse 6, and then the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied."

What a gracious Lord we have, that He led these men to the place where their faith would be confirmed for them as saving faith when they formally transferred their allegiance to Jesus as their Savior and Lord. The Holy Spirit would not only baptize them into Christ's death, but He would immediately give them also the revelatory gift of speaking with tongues, and being able to prophesy. This kind of an event does not take place in our days, because all has been made clear for us by the completed canon of Holy Scripture. The New Testament Scriptures define for us what takes place in every believer's heart when they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ savingly.

They hear the gospel of what Christ has done for them, the sinner. They see that they must repent of their sins, although that repentance is not what saves them. Rather, their eyes are open to the truth by the Holy Spirit Himself, that they need Christ's grace to be saved. The Holy Spirit opens the sinner's eyes so that they can see that Christ is the only perfect Man; that faith in His righteousness and His sufferings on their behalf, for their sins, are the only thing that will avail to save them and to bring them to God. Then, when they savingly believe, they are sealed with the Holy Spirit, as it says in Ephesians 1: 13. The believer in Christ is given the Holy Spirit to dwell in their heart, as the guarantee of their inheritance. They then experientially know, by faith, that the Spirit is there as their Helper, and they will rejoice greatly at the greatness of this gift to them.

The Lord Jesus Himself promises the believer that the Spirit will be with them forever. In John 14: 15 and 16, He said – "If you love Me, keep My commandments." "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper; that He may abide with you forever – the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He will be in you." What a wonderful promise this is! The believer knows that the Spirit will be leading them, teaching them, and guiding them into all the truth. But how precious a thing it is also, when we as believers can help one another to better understand the Holy Spirit's working in relation to the truth of the Scriptures. This is what happened here, and brethren, this is what I pray will be taking place in our church, with us, as well.