

“Clarity”

Acts 18:24-19:10

Pastor Jarrett Stephens

Is there anything more important than clarity? I think of it as it relates to:

- Instruction we give our children – we tell them to do something, we warn them about something, and then we say something like, “Am I clear?”
- Or at work...we get a directive or give a directive and in order for that directive to be carried out or executed in the right way there has to be clarity. Does the person or team we instructed know exactly what they are to be doing.
- In an organization...or even in a church like this, there has to be clarity regarding our mission and purpose. It's clarity around the mission that allows us to say both “yes” to programs and activities that help us accomplish and further the mission and “no” to certain activities and programs that may be good in and of themselves, but they don't help us accomplish the objective we are after.

This issue of clarity is critical! I think of it in terms of physical eyesight. If there isn't clarity in what you are seeing, that typically points out that something is wrong.

Illus. Glasses – I remember the first time I noticed something was wrong with me. I had perfect vision for as long as I could remember. And then one day, I'm driving to work early and I noticed for the first time the street signs were a little blurry.

Well, I just wrote it off because I figured I was up early and my eyes hadn't adjusted or I just felt like no one could see those signs clearly from that far away. I went a few more weeks and it continued to take place and so I figured I'd set up an appointment with the optometrist.

I went in there CERTAIN that there was nothing wrong and the doctor put me through all the tests...and I'm telling you, when he had me look through all those instruments and I saw with true clarity for the first time in a long time, I was BLOWN AWAY!

It was a modern-day miracle! I had no idea what I was missing out on! I walked out and the sky was a greater blue than I had ever seen before! The green was greener and I can ever remember seeing before. I could actually see the design on the trunk of trees and in the leaves. I could see the road signs.

I COULD NOT believe what I was missing out on! It was AMAZING! Once I had clarity, life changed!

Now, I could have taken our passage a number of different directions today, but in this section we are looking at, it's this idea of CLARITY that sticks out to me the most.

And here is what we are going to learn today as it relates to clarity:
We are going to get some clarity regarding salvation, baptism and the work of the Holy Spirit as it relates to both.

Now, let's begin like we always do by reviewing where we have been. Paul is on his second missionary journey. Scott Riling did an excellent job of covering for me last week and talking about his time in the city of Corinth.

He spent some 18 months here ministering to the people and evangelizing this city (**SHOW MAP**). It's here where he met the couple, Priscilla and Aquila (we'll read about them again today) – they were a Jewish couple and evidently tent-makers like Paul. They were or at least became believers at some point and would serve as ministry partners with Paul.

Let me just pause here and throw this out there! Priscilla and Aquila were a married couple on fire for Jesus...and they made quite an impact as we will see in today's message.

I highlight this to underscore the fact that you and your spouse together can make a HUGE difference for Jesus! In fact, I tell every couple I marry at their marriage ceremony – I read John 17 where Jesus speaks to the Church about being one and in so doing the world will see that the Father sent the Son into the world.

I read that and challenge them that their marriage is the single greatest opportunity for evangelism they have. Because when you come together as one: from different backgrounds and upbringings, yet you come together as one under Christ, the world will see and take note of it and begin to question, why your marriage is so different from what they see in the world – the answer of course is Jesus! Your marriage should be pointing people to Jesus!

Illus. Marriage Conference – I can't encourage you enough to be a part of this marriage conference. It's a way that we as a church help disciple you in your marriage...invest in your marriage. You won't regret it. The goal is to use your marriage as ministry.

I LOVE that Priscilla and Aquila are together in scripture serving Jesus and blessing the church. What an example.

Paul leaves Corinth (**SHOW MAP**) and sets sail for Syria (Acts 18:18-22. He goes to Cenchræe and then to Ephesus (a VERY important city that he will eventually come back to and stay for over two years!). He leaves Ephesus for the first time, sails to Caesarea (**HOLY LAND PLUG** – April 3 info meeting), goes up to Jerusalem and then circles back to Antioch to report to his "Sending Church" and with this he closes out his second missionary journey.

Now, we don't know how much time passed between the end of the second missionary journey – that's Acts 18:22 and the start of the third missionary journey – that's Acts 18:23.

The scripture simply says: **Acts 18:23** – "After spending some time there (this is taking place within a few months...Paul doesn't stay long...we're talking he probably gets past the winter

months – we’re talking early 50’s AD – probably 52 AD and then he’s off again on what will be his 3rd and last missionary journey if you’re not counting his journey to Rome which we will get to in a few weeks!) , **he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia, and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.”**

Now, if these areas are sounding familiar to you, that’s good...that’s means you’ve been with us this entire series. **(SHOW MAP)** These are regions that Paul established churches in on his first and second missionary journeys and he is returning to strengthen these disciples and make sure they are growing in their faith.

I love this about Paul...you see such a pastor’s heart in him. I mean he is a missionary evangelist **FOR SURE!** He wants to see people come to know Christ and he wants to take the name of Jesus where his name has never been heard before.

BUT...he also wants to see those that are converted grow in their faith. He wants to make sure they are being discipled in the right way. It’s why he established leadership in these churches and it’s why he returned to them.

Paul wants the Church to be both deep and wide! You know that song?!

Listen...this is a lesson for us not only as a church, but also personally. We ought to be believers who are both **DEEP** and **WIDE**.

There should be no pitting of one against the other! Yes, we want to be a **DEEP** church! We don’t want to just stay on the surface all of our lives and never go in depth into the scripture or take our faith to the next level...no, we want to be **DEEP!**

But, we also want to be **WIDE** – We exist for those not yet here! Our reach is to extend and bring others into the faith so that we see more and more people respond to the gospel message...it’s why we serve, it’s why we give, it’s why we go!

My prayer is that Champion Forest will **ALWAYS** be known as a church that is both **DEEP** and **WIDE!**

This was Paul’s life. He wanted to reach everyone no matter how far away they were **AND** he once they were reached, he labored to make sure they were going deep in their faith and developing their faith so they wouldn’t be led astray...so they would be able to endure until the end.

DEEP and **WIDE**, Champion Forest...let’s make sure we are **ALWAYS** as individuals...as families...as a church – **DEEP** and **WIDE**.

Now, it’s at this point that we are going to meet some people. One is a name that if you have been in the church for a while, you will probably at least be familiar with – it’s a man by the name of Apollos.

The other is a group of people and we have no idea what their names are – the scripture doesn't say. It's here though in reading about Apollos and these men that we are going to get clarity regarding some pretty significant subjects in the Bible:

1. Salvation
2. Baptism
3. The work of the Holy Spirit as it relates to salvation and baptism.

Let's read about Apollos first and I'll make some comments as we read.

Acts 18:24 – “Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures.”

Just a couple of details to help fill this picture out here. First, is we are getting re-introduced to the city of Ephesus. Paul came here toward the end of his second missionary journey along with the married duo of Priscilla and Aquila.

Now, there was a synagogue there that Paul had reasoned in and the Jews wanted him to stay, but Paul wanted to get to Jerusalem for Passover and said if it's the Lord's will, I'll be back.

Well, he sets sail and takes off, but he leaves Priscilla and Aquila behind to build up the ministry there in Ephesus...it's probably why Paul was going to make sure to get back by there on this third missionary journey.

Ephesus was the capital of the Roman Province of Asia at this time (**SHOW MAP**) and it was a MAJOR city. It was referred to as the “treasure house of Asia” and at the time somewhere between 200-250,000 people.

It had a large Temple there erected in honor of the goddess Diana (Latin) or Artemis (Greek name). You'll hear more about this in weeks to come. It was an influential city and evidently this Jewish man by the name of Apollos – who the scripture says is a “native of Alexandria”.

Now, that's Egypt! It just goes to show you that Jewish people were everywhere. And I'm sure as a God-fearing Jew, Apollos made the trip to Jerusalem on numerous occasions...and while we don't know the whole story at some point he was introduced to some of the teachings of Jesus and I believe from the context that we gather FROM this passage of scripture even knew of his death and resurrection. He was a follower of Jesus.

Now, just as Ephesus was the capital of the Roman Province of Asia at the time, Alexandria was political and intellectual capital city of Egypt.

Interesting side note: Alexandria is where the Septuagint (Hebrew text into Greek) was founded two centuries before the birth of Christ.

No question, Apollos as a Jew would have been trained reading these scriptures and evidently, he was quite educated not only academically, but spiritually he could hold his own (end of v. 28 - he used the scripture to point people to Jesus) - the scripture tells us:

Acts 18:25-26 – “He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit (enthusiastic, energetic – my kind of guy!), he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. (Now, keep that phrase in mind...we’re going to see it again here in just a moment and we’ll work it out!) 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.”

We won’t stay here long, but please notice the maturity of Priscilla and Aquila. They hear this man teaching about Jesus and notice he is HIGHLY gifted. But, he also is not clear on some doctrine-related issues...he needs some clarity!

Notice what Priscilla and Aquila do...again, NOTE their maturity!

- They don’t call him out in front of everyone at the synagogue...
- They don’t blast him on social media...
- They don’t get passive aggressive with him and appear to be one thing in front of him, and then talk differently when he is not around...

No...notice what they do. They (v. 26) “take him aside and explain to him the way of God more accurately. They confront him in gentleness, love, concern, humility – that’s the maturity of Priscilla and Aquila!

And note the maturity of Apollos - by all accounts he received what they had to say! It seems he was humble as well...teachable in Spirit.

We’re speaking about clarity today...well, this is a masters level class in this one verse right here on how to help someone who may be confused (and not even know it) gain clarity about the things of God.

- We don’t beat them over the head with truth...
- We don’t show them up...
- We don’t make them feel small or insignificant because we know more than they do...

Instead, like Priscilla and Aquila, if we want people (we’re talking about brothers and sisters in the faith here – this is family) to receive what we have to say, speak to them with gentleness, humility, respect, love and concern. See how that goes!

In the words of the Theologian Mary Poppins, “A spoon full of sugar helps the medicine go down!”

And if you are the one that is being confronted like in the case of Apollos, then learn from him and exercise a little humility. Is there truth in what the person is saying to you?

Prov. 27:6 – “Faithful are the wounds of a friend...”

It may hurt when we are confronted, but like Apollos let’s have a humble spirit...a teachable spirit. God could be using that person to help protect us from error...from sin! Just a thought!

Illus. Steven Smith – pulpit and notes story

The scripture continues: **Acts 18:27-28 – “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 (he knew his Old Testament – that it pointed to Jesus!) that the Christ was Jesus.”**

This is Apollos. He’s mentioned only a few times in scripture, and his ministry made a pretty big impact it seems wherever he went.

Now, let’s look at this next section of scripture, where we are not given a specific name, but instead some disciples are lumped together, but the issue of salvation and baptism is the same.

Acts 19:1-7 – “And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth (this is in Achaia (Greece and Apollos probably heard about the work there from Priscilla and Aquila – that’s where they first met Paul Acts 18), Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples.² And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And they said, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”³ And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” (I want you to notice that baptism is a BIG deal in the scripture. Paul assumed that if these men were true disciples, they would have been water baptized into Christ at salvation. We’ll talk it through here in just a moment.) They said, “Into John’s baptism.” (Still living in the O.T.)⁴ And Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.”⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized (water baptism by immersion) in the name of the Lord Jesus.⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying.⁷ There were about twelve men in all.”

OKAY! Here we go! Let’s get a little clarity as to what’s going on here and let’s look at it in these three categories:

- In salvation.
- In baptism.
- In the work of the Holy Spirit as it relates to both.

Now, as we get going here, I want to emphasize a point we made early on in our FORWARD series. You'll have to go back and listen, but we made a really important point in setting up this book, *The Acts of the Apostles* much of what we will read and study is meant to be taken as descriptive in nature NOT prescriptive.

Meaning, what we read in Acts is the history of the early church. Some of what went on WON'T be replicated, nor is it meant to be replicated.

God was acting in a certain way at this point in history according to his divine plan as he established the Church. While we want to model and strive as much as possible to look like the early church, some of what they were privy to and experienced was only for that day and time.

This is really important to remember as we read texts like these. We don't base any theology off of one verse or a set of verses alone. Instead, we interpret them in light of the whole of scripture.

And when we look at the WHOLE of scripture, let's see what we learn about these three subjects. Remember what we are after today – CLARITY.

1. Clarity about salvation

We know from what we have already studied in Acts that salvation is found in Christ and in Christ alone. In Acts 4, when Peter and John are arrested in the temple for healing a lame man and they stand before the ruling council giving an account for their actions recall what they said!

Acts 4:10-12 – “let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

This was the message the apostles and early followers of Jesus preached over and over again. The only way one is:

- saved...
- brought into a right relationship with God...
- has their sins forgiven...

Is to repent of their sins and come to Jesus by faith. We see this over and over again and we really worked the clarity of salvation thing out in Acts 15 at the Jerusalem Council. Go back if you missed that message and listen to it.

The early church comes together...there was some disagreement (NOT about what God said concerning salvation – it's ALWAYS been through Christ and Christ alone, but the Church was struggling with it so they came together) and the discussion was in order for someone to be saved, must they repent of sin, trust in Jesus by faith and convert to Judaism?

And the Church overwhelmingly shot that notion down and Peter, the defacto leader of the disciples and the early church stands up and listen to:

Acts 15:7-11 – “And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us,⁹ and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith.¹⁰ Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?¹¹ But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

You take these verses in Acts, as well as other verses throughout the New Testament and you will see that salvation is for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord. It’s just that simple.

Eph. 2:8-9 – “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

1 John 5:11-12 – “And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.¹² Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

So, we know that to have salvation, it comes by the name of Jesus. He is the way, the truth and the LIFE (John 14:7).

Now, Apollos he was teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus (Acts 18:25). He seems to have known his name. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord.

Somewhere along the way, Apollos learned of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and I believe by faith received him as Lord of his life. He had just not learned or heard that he was to be baptizing people in the name of Jesus! He hadn’t been taught what Jesus said at the Great Commission (go and baptize in my name!)

These men in Acts 19 though...they are different from Apollos. While they are referred to as “disciples” in (v. 1), they were not disciples of Jesus. They didn’t even know Jesus had come. Paul had to explain that to them in (v. 4).

This is why they were not saved from a biblical standpoint – they hadn’t heard of Jesus. You can’t be saved without having a head knowledge of who Jesus is and what he has done that is then transferred to a heart knowledge where you give him your life.

So, clarity about salvation. It comes by Jesus, through Jesus and it happens when we turn from sin and place our faith and trust in Jesus – PERIOD.

This leads to a second doctrine we need clarity on:

2. Clarity about baptism

Now, both Apollos and these men knew only about John's baptism. If you remember, John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus, was the forerunner to the Messiah.

He lived in the desert...ate locusts and wild honey...he was a prophet and he baptized people out in the Jordan River. This was his message:

Matt. 3:11 – “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (Luke 3:16, John 1:32-33)

The one coming after him was of course, Jesus. Now, John's baptism notice:

- It was linked with repentance of sin.
- It was pointed to the one who was coming (Jesus!)
- It was a prophecy of the Holy Spirit to come.

Apollos only KNEW (key phrase) of John's baptism, but as we stated had evidently put his faith in Christ. He exhibits that he has the spirit (teachable, fervent in Spirit, gifts of the Spirit). He is explained the way of God more accurately and did you notice no mention of rebaptism?

I think this is purposeful in that it shows us Apollos although he only knew of John's baptism was baptized INTO Christ at that time.

Again, he knew Jesus, he had just never been instructed on what Jesus taught regarding baptism. This is probably one of the major teachings that Priscilla and Aquila helped explain to him in detail with they took him aside.

Look at the men from Acts 19 though. When Paul asks them in (v. 3) “into what then were you baptized?” They said into John's baptism, and then Paul explains to them that actually pointed to Jesus.

Apollos seemed to have known this previously and embraced it, while these men are hearing it for the first time, because (v. 5).

Acts 19:5 – “On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

They knew about the promises of the John, but didn't know about their fulfillment until Paul articulated it for them. At that point they trusted in Jesus and followed him by being baptized in his name.

So, clarity about salvation – it comes by Jesus and through Jesus when we trust in him for the forgiveness of sin. No more. No less.

Clarity about baptism – we are water baptized (by immersion) – and btw - there was no debate about the mode of baptism. The word means to “immerse” – this is why we baptize the way we do...it’s why we are called Baptists...and its why it’s a CORE conviction for us.

When you request to join our church, in order to be a member, we ask you to be baptized by immersion. Why is that? Because we believe in a regenerate church membership...meaning only those who believe are baptized (why we don’t baptize infants or small children for that matter!) and we baptized you in the name of Jesus. This identifies you with his Church.

You are always water baptized AFTER you believe just like these men were. Baptism doesn’t save you (to be CLEAR), it does though identify you as member in God’s Church.

Illus. License/Symbolic ordinance

- Thief on cross, wasn’t baptized, but he was saved.
- He would have been baptized, I promise you.

We see how important baptism is because of this passage of scripture. Apollos needed this instruction on baptism to have a more effective ministry and these men needed to undergo baptism becoming disciples of Jesus, not John the Baptist.

3. Clarity about the Holy Spirit

In our passage of scripture, Paul baptizes these new believers in Ephesus, he lays his hands on them and the Bible says they begin speaking in tongues and prophesying.

Some will use this passage and others like it to say that speaking in tongues and prophesying...it is evidence OF salvation. This is how you know you’re saved, you will prophecy and speak in tongues (language you don’t know and that maybe does not even resemble a human language).

Now, we’ve seen this before in Acts. At Pentecost, Acts 2, the Holy Spirit comes for the FIRST TIME and we read about Jewish believers who were filled with the Spirit and spoke in tongues. It authenticates what God said will happen is happening.

In Acts 8, Samaritans for the FIRST TIME hear the gospel and receive Jesus and they speak in tongues. It authenticates what God has said will happen, happens – Samaritans are brought into the Kingdom.

In Acts 10, Gentiles for the FIRST TIME hear the gospel and receive Jesus for the and they speak in tongues and it authenticates what God said will happen, happens – Gentiles are brought into the Kingdom.

Then it happens here in Acts 19. Jewish disciples of John for the FIRST TIME hear the gospel and receive Jesus and they speak in tongues and it authenticates what God said will happen, happens!

Does this mean that if you haven't spoken in tongues that you are NOT saved? OR that you have some kind of second experience with the Holy Spirit that comes after salvation?

Absolutely NOT! Remember, what we talked about earlier. Descriptive vs. Prescriptive.

What is taking place in all these instances is descriptive. God was pouring out his Spirit as prophesied in the Old Testament, specifically Joel 2:28-32 – and He was using these instances as examples to point to the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy that those experiencing these things would have been very familiar with!

God is authenticating his movement among all these people groups in this special and unique way. Speaking in tongues is not evidence of salvation, it WAS in these specific texts evidence of an authentication of a move of God.

Let John Stott explain: “The norm of Christian experience, then, is a cluster of four things: repentance, faith in Jesus, water baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Though the perceived order may vary a little, the four belong together and are universal in Christian initiation. The laying on of apostolic hands, however together with tongue-speaking and prophesying, were special to Ephesus, as to Samaria, in order to demonstrate visibly and publicly that particular people groups were incorporated into Christ by the Spirit; the New Testament does not universalize them. There are no Samaritans or disciples of John the Baptist left in the world today.”

Again, from the whole of scripture, we know the role of the Holy Spirit.

- He draws us to the Father (John 6:44)
- He seals us for the day of redemption (Eph. 1:13-14).
- He lives in us at the moment of salvation (Rom. 8:9)
- He guides us in truth (John 17).

And he does so much more. Clarity. Are you clear about what you know and believe. I hope today if you were unclear that I, in the spirit of Priscilla and Aquila, could take you aside in these 35 min or so and show you the way of God more accurately.

A more important question: Are you sure about your salvation? What about baptism? Is the Holy Spirit living in you and at work in your life?

May the Spirit of God speak to you in this moment and give you all the clarity you need concerning these important matters.

Let's pray.

Please Note: This document is not meant to be a published, cited, annotated research paper. It is simply a transcript of a spoken message, provided as a resource. Many commentaries, articles, and other sermon helps were likely studied and contributed to the forming of this message.