



ONE SPIRIT, ONE BAPTISM

SERIES: *LIFE UNLEASHED*

Acts 18:23–19:7

40th Message

Brian Morgan

April 28, 2019

Since September of last year my daughter, Katie, her husband Steve and their three children have been living with us while they are remodeling their home in Willow Glen. The original home was a tiny two bedroom one bath home built in the 1920's. When she first called us about buying it, I had some reservations. First, there were no anchor bolts on the foundation; second, the living room floor had a slight slope down to the fireplace; and third, a large playroom was added to the detached garage, but was not built with a permit. I raised my objections, but to no avail, for my daughter was enamored with the house, not to mention the idyllic neighborhood, which was filled with children, had an elementary school and park across the street, and was within walking distance from downtown Willow Glen. They bought the home and have loved living there, but, before they moved in, dad had foundation bolts installed.

With the growing needs of their family, they decided to add a second story with two bedrooms and a bath, while reconfiguring the downstairs. With an excellent contractor and quality craftsmen, the work took off and the second story shot up quickly on a new foundation at the back of the house, while the original foundation and the fireplace at the front of house which had sunk 4 inches was left untouched (not as bad as the Millennium Tower which has sunk 17 inches and tilted 14 inches). But three weeks ago the work came to sudden halt and couldn't resume until the original foundation was raised and made secure.

Enter Foundation Strategies. They designed a process to lift sunken foundations by driving steel piers down to bedrock. Then they attach them to the existing foundation, and once in place, they slowly lift the foundation. For my daughter's home, 9 piers drilled down an average of 30 feet to hit bedrock. On Wednesday the magical lift took place, and now that their foundation is level and secured to bedrock, construction can continue. The moral of the story: If your foundation is not secure, stop the construction! The same applies to the church, which is likened to a holy temple that God is building and we, who are believers in Christ, are "like living stones that are being built into a spiritual house" (1 Pet 2:5). Paul writes,

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 3:10–11 ESV)

As the psalmist affirms, "Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain" (Ps 127:1 NIV). To emphasize the point, Dr. Luke gives us back-to-back incidents where kingdom work comes to a halt to address a deficiency in the foundation of the disciples' faith. Once the problem is addressed and corrected, the construction of God's house continues. We pick up our story at the conclusion of Paul's second missionary journey in Acts 18:18–23.

On his second journey, Paul and his companions preached the gospel throughout Macedonia. Despite violent opposition from

unbelieving Jews, they successfully planted churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, Borea and Corinth. In Corinth Paul met a married couple, Aquila and Priscilla, who worked together as tentmakers (or leather workers) and welcomed Paul to share their home and their trade. This began a lifelong friendship. The couple joined Paul when he sailed to Ephesus, and they moved their business there for the next four or five years while hosting a congregation of believers in their home. Paul was given an open door of evangelism in Ephesus, the strategic city he had longed to evangelize, but he turned it down to pay his vows and honor God for his faithfulness in Jerusalem. Richard Longenecker writes,

Nevertheless, he promised to return, if it were in the will of God. And with a heart lightened by the prospect of a future ministry at Ephesus, he sailed for Jerusalem...[After he greeted the church, he returned to Antioch and] remained at Syrian Antioch, Luke tells us, for "some time," probably from the summer of 52 through the spring of 53. Then, on what was to be his third missionary journey, he set out for Ephesus some fifteen hundred miles to the west, revisiting the churches throughout "the region of Galatia and Phrygia" and "strengthening all the disciples."¹

I. Paul's Disciples Educate the Teacher (18:24–27)

A. A gifted and powerful teacher (18:24–25)

Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. 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. (Acts 18:24–25)

During the year or so between Paul's departure from Ephesus and his return, another Jew—named Apollos and a native of Alexandria—came to Ephesus. Luke tells us he was an "eloquent man" ("the phrase often applies to someone proficient in rhetoric"²) who had thorough command of the Hebrew Scriptures. "A flourishing Hellenistic Jewish literary culture existed in Alexandria, without significant parallel elsewhere." It was here that the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (the Septuagint) was produced and where the gifted scholar Philo, a contemporary of Jesus, studied and taught.

Secondly, Apollos had been well taught about the life and ministry of Jesus, and what he taught was accurate. Third, he was "fervent in spirit," meaning he was "on fire," so that whenever he spoke, his words had power and conviction. Apollos was the complete package, **a first-rate scholar and a powerful teacher**. However, there was one serious deficiency, "he knew only of the baptism of John." John's baptism was a baptism of repentance to prepare God's people for the one who was to come, who would "baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Luke 3:16). Though Apollos knew a lot about Jesus, no one told him from the day of Pentecost onward the Spirit was being poured out and bringing life to both Jews and Gentiles.

B. Apollos corrected and completed (18:26)

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. (Acts 18:26)

By divine providence Priscilla and Aquila happened to be in the audience when Apollos spoke at the synagogue. Though they must have been impressed with his rhetorical skills, keen understanding and bold presentation of the gospel story, they knew it was incomplete. To their credit, Priscilla and Aquila did not correct him publicly in the synagogue, which would have been shameful, nor did they criticize him on Facebook or Twitter. Instead they “took him aside” privately “and explained the way of God more accurately.” Keener suggests that,

The term *προσλαμβάνω* (“take aside”) can indicate that they “took Apollos aside,” but the term also applies to welcoming someone into one’s circle or home. Given Apollos’ apparently substantive transformation and ancient hospitality conventions the couple probably did not simply take him aside for a few moments in public but welcomed him into their home for food and discussion.³

Can you imagine the fascinating discussion they must have had? For hours, over a lingering meal, they would have shared their stories. Priscilla and Aquila would have wanted to know all about Apollos’ youth and studies in Alexandria. What life was like among the great philosophers. How he came to learn about Jesus the Messiah. And Apollos would have wanted to learn how these tentmakers came to know about Jesus and ended up in Ephesus, far from home. This question opened the door for Priscilla and Aquila to give their gentle correction, which is wrapped up in the sharing of good news. Priscilla, a gifted conversationalist, tells their story with enthusiasm and candor—first their painful expulsion from Rome; then relocating and setting up shop in Corinth; the miraculous encounter and partnership with Paul the apostle; the joyous weeks of working tirelessly side by side, their hearts burning, as Paul shared his own story. How his blinding encounter with the living Christ on the Damascus road turned his world upside down; how God commissioned him to proclaim the name of Jesus before “the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” (9:15); finally his success over the past five years planting new groups of believers—even in Corinth of all places! Despite violent opposition, beatings and imprisonment, how God delivered him as he promised, sometimes using the Roman authorities as his instruments.

And then comes the correction, a simple coda to their story.

“You see Apollos, Aquila and I have come to realize that knowing that Jesus was the Messiah and died for our sins is only the beginning of the Good News. What good is forgiveness if it doesn’t change our sinful nature? As a teacher, you can’t simply hold up Jesus’ life as an example to follow, for that only condemns people to self-effort, failure and guilt. We can’t do any of this on our own, through our own power. We need the Holy Spirit, just as John preached. He promised that when the Messiah came, he would baptize us in the Holy Spirit. After being raised from the dead, Jesus was ‘exalted at the right hand of God, and received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit’ which is now available to all through baptism in the name of Jesus.

The new age has arrived and now everything God asks of us, he will do in us through his Holy Spirit. Aquila and I know it’s true, because we have experienced it. As the Spirit began to take control

of our lives, Aquila and I felt a new eagerness to pray, a surprising boldness to share Christ with others, a deep hunger to learn the Scriptures, a new joy in our worship, and a desire to share all that we have with others. Even better yet, the renewal continues every day.”

It is to Apollos’ credit that, though he was a learned scholar from a great university in Alexandria, he was open to learning from those who had no formal education and that he was open to such a supernatural transformation. And in this case, it was a woman who took the lead alongside her husband and “explained to him the way of God more accurately.” Keener observes that in Luke’s writings,

Name sequence can be important, especially when it diverges from the anticipated ancient norm of naming the husband first. Luke normally mentions first the dominant member of a pair; the mention of Priscilla’s name first suggests her primary role as Apollos’ tutor...Even though his setting is private, Apollos’ willingness to learn from her alongside her husband might imply that, for him, Priscilla was such an exceptional woman.⁴

C. Apollos encouraged, sent and strengthened (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, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus. (Acts 18:27–28)

Equipped with a renewed understanding of the gospel, his foundation strengthened and anchored, Apollos expressed his desire to cross the Aegean and minister in Greece. Luke Timothy Johnson notes that “the Western text expands this verse providing motivation for his intention: ‘In Ephesus certain Corinthians were residing. They heard him speaking. They begged him to come with them to their homeland.’”⁵ Considering Apollos’ rhetorical skills, fervent spirit and command of the Scriptures, he would prove extremely valuable in Corinth where Paul had faced severe opposition from Jewish leaders.

The church responded to Apollos’ desire with a resounding encouragement, and Priscilla, Aquila and other believers wrote letters of recommendation to introduce him to the brethren there. When he arrived in Corinth, Apollos “greatly helped those who believe” by refuting the Jews in the synagogue, overwhelming them by his powerful exposition of the Scriptures, demonstrating that Jesus was the Messiah.

D. The blessing of a teachable and appreciative spirit

Reflecting on the incident, I am deeply moved by the blessing bestowed to the church through the grace of mutual appreciation. The text leaves open the question whether Apollos already possessed the Spirit, since there is no mention of him being baptized. I suspect Luke did that on purpose, for what makes a person a **disciple** is not one’s complete knowledge of the faith, but their faithful obedience to what they know to be true. If his or her knowledge is deficient, God is sovereign and is more than able to lead them into all the truth.

God bless Priscilla and Aquila for not condemning and shunning Apollos. Instead they embraced him, appreciating his gifts, and then privately supplied what was lacking in his faith. Because of their timely and gracious intervention, a good teacher became a better teacher and a tower of strength to the church in Corinth. **Martin Luther** was the first to suggest that Apollos may have been the author of the book of Hebrews. Karen Jobes notes that the unique

style of Hebrews is what one would expect from a scholar educated in Alexandria.

In keeping with the style of a person well educated in formal rhetoric, the Greek of Hebrews is highly literary and very ornate. The vocabulary is sophisticated, and includes 150 words that are not found elsewhere in the New Testament...[and] the structure of the epistle conforms to conventions found in Greek rhetoric used when speech was designed to persuade its audience to action... The high rhetorical quality of Hebrews indicates that its author most likely had the most advanced literary education of any of the new Testament writers.⁶

And God bless Apollos for his humility to learn from others who lacked any formal education and status.

My motto is “Everyone has something to teach me.”

John Felstiner, *Paul Celan, Poet, Survivor, Jew*

II. The Apostle Educates the Disciples (19:1-7)

A. The disciples’ deficient faith (19:1-3)

And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. 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.” And he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They said, “Into John’s baptism.” (Acts 19:1-3)

Meanwhile, Paul was making his way toward Ephesus, the largest and most strategic city in Asia. From Pisidian Antioch Paul took the road through the interior to Ephesus, a journey of about 225 miles. Once Paul arrived he happened upon some “disciples,” who he initially thought were believers, but there was something amiss that prompted him to question whether they had received the Spirit. Luke doesn’t tell us whether it was something they said, or the way they prayed or behaved, but somehow Paul sensed an absence of the Spirit’s energizing power.

Probing their experience, Paul asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” Their answer was “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” Their answer cannot be taken to mean they did not know about the Holy Spirit, for the Spirit was active all through the Old Testament.

The Old Dispensation	The New Age of the Spirit
Restricted to Israel’s Leaders	Given to all without distinction
Given for a particular mission	Poured out with measure
Temporary, can be removed	Permanently sealed = new heart
No correlation to godliness	Fruit of the Spirit more important than gifts of the Spirit

But the gift was restricted to specific individuals, particularly prophets, kings, and judges anointed for a particular mission. Nor was the gift permanent; it could be withdrawn, as in the case of Samson and Saul. But the prophets looked forward to a day when God would “pour out” his Spirit without measure upon all peoples without distinction and write his law on their hearts permanently. It was John the Baptist, Israel’s last prophet, who said this is what the

coming Messiah would do, which made him so much greater than John.

Like Apollos, they weren’t aware this new age was here. When Paul probed further as to “into what” were they baptized, they answered, “Into John’s baptism.” Paul’s questions assume that when a person believes and is baptized in the name of Jesus, they receive the blessing of the new age, the indwelling life of the Holy Spirit. As Peter preached on the day of Pentecost,

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (Acts 2:38)

B. The disciples faith is corrected and completed (19:4-7)

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.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about twelve men in all. (Acts 19:4-7)

In response to their defective knowledge and experience, Paul did not rebuke them, but rather filled in the missing pieces. He further instructed them about Jesus, who John predicted would baptize them with the Holy Spirit. Placing their faith in Jesus, they were baptized and when Paul laid his hands upon them, they received the Holy Spirit with the same signs the first Jewish believers did at Pentecost — speaking in tongues and prophesying. John Stott gives his masterful conclusion:

They experienced a mini-Pentecost. Better, Pentecost caught up on them. Better still, they were caught up into it, as its promised blessings became theirs. The norm of Christian experience, then, is a cluster of four things: repentance, faith in Jesus, water baptism and the gift of the 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 groups were incorporated into Christ by the Spirit.⁷

Luke concludes his account noting that there were about “twelve” men in all. The detail is significant as it recalls Jesus preparing to launch his ministry through the twelve apostles and warning them “not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4-5), which he explained was “the Holy Spirit.” This event is a prelude to Paul’s work in Ephesus, “a place where not only social and civic power, but also religious and spiritual power, were concentrated. Perhaps that, too, is why Luke has begun his account of Paul’s work there with a story about a fresh outpouring of the Spirit. There must be nothing second-hand about the spirit’s power when you are faced with the powers of the world.”⁸ Now that the foundation is laid and secured, the work of building can continue.

III. Questions for Reflection

A. Have you been baptized by the Spirit?

This text has been used by some in Pentecostal and charismatic circles as evidence for a two stage conversion process, beginning with faith and conversion followed by receiving the Holy Spirit. Michael Green, a true charismatic, writes,

There is no possible justification, among those who take the New Testament as their guide, in claiming biblical support for a doctrine of “second blessing,” a mandatory further experience after conversion called the baptism in the Holy Spirit. In each of the seven references, the phrase “baptism with the Spirit” is unambiguously used of an initial plunging into Christ. It is not talking of the higher reaches of Christian experience, but about the basics of being a Christian.⁹

Having said that, these two incidents demonstrate that you can possess a lot of knowledge about Jesus, even be orthodox in your thinking and go to church regularly, but still be outside the kingdom of God. My college roommate was fond of saying, “Going to church doesn’t make you a Christian, anymore than sitting in your garage makes you an automobile.” As Jesus encouraged the Jewish scholar Nicodemus, “You must be born from above,” which means “born of water and the Spirit” (Ezek 36:24–27). If this describes you, don’t wait another day. You are invited come to Doug and Cheri Bryan’s home at 2:00 pm today and confess your faith publicly and baptized and you will receive forgiveness of your sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

B. Are you filled by the Spirit?

Once we have been baptized by the Spirit, the apostles command us to “be filled” with the Spirit. Baptism is our initial and unrepeatable experience, but the filling must be constantly maintained and renewed. The Scriptures gives us two helpful metaphors for the Spirit. One is the “wind” (or “breath”) that “blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes” (John 3:8), and the other is “water,” specifically “rivers of living water” (John 4:10; 7:38; Isa 12:3; 44:3) that break forth in our dry souls, like streams in the desert (Isa 35:6). Wind and water speak to the primal needs of our existence—breath and thirst. Both must be continually renewed or we fall into exhaustion, dryness and ultimately death. In closing I would like to share four reflections from my own experience of being “filled with the Spirit.”

1. The absolute necessity to disconnect and breathe. When we are drowning in work and the stuff of life, while tethered to gadgets that pour an unending stream of everyone else’s consciousness into our minds, we risk crowding out the Spirit and drowning out its voice. We need to breathe. That might mean physically breathing, through exercise. It might mean emotionally breathing, by unplugging, leaving the devices at home and getting out into God’s creation, seeing his handiwork in wildflowers and butterflies and hearing his voice in the wind.

2. The necessity to admit weakness and pray in community. When we encounter tough times or grapple with sin, human nature can drive us to solitude. But in the dark, alone, is where we wither and die. Pouring sunlight on our struggles and shortcomings by confessing our weakness to our close community, and receiving their prayers, refreshes and affirms the new life we have in the Spirit.

3. The necessity of stepping out in boldness and engaging in community. Being filled with Spirit is not only as act of receiving but also giving. When Paul commands us to “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18), the command is followed by a string of participles—speaking, singing, giving thanks, submitting—that activate the life of the Spirit in community and the world. Other texts expand

the list to serving, rescuing, meditating, rejoicing, encouraging, listening, lamenting, discerning, praising and giving. Every day is a gift, filled with people God places in our path. People he wants us to talk to. People who need a word of encouragement or desperately need to hear his story. They could be at work, at the gym, in your neighborhood, at your children’s school. Ask God to bring these people to your attention, and then just boldly invite them to talk. You will be surprised how a simple, genuine “how are you doing?” can open someone up. Such conversations are often mutually restoring.

4. Filled with the Spirit slows me down, to focus on one thing and do it well with love. Do you have a to-do list a mile long? Most of us do. But who among us can take on twenty-five tasks—let alone five—and do them excellently? Scattering our energy brings frustration and depletes us. Like Martha we become “anxious and troubled about many things,” but Jesus encouraged her that “few things are necessary—or indeed only one” (Luke 10:41–42). Similarly, I find that when I am able to disconnect from the world and connect with the Lord, the Spirit often brings to mind just one person or situation to care for. It is never a long to-do list. Inviting God into this place, seeking the freedom to focus, lets us rediscover the meaning and purpose in an individual task, enabling us to do it well while finding joy and radiating love, both toward him and others.

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. (1 Pet 4:10–11)

1. Richard N. Longenecker, *Acts*, EBC 9; ed. Frank E. Gaebel and J. D. Douglas; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), paragraph 52183.
2. Craig S. Keener, *Acts, An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 2:2800.
3. Keener, *Acts*, 2:2808.
4. Keener, *Acts*, 2:2809, 2811.
5. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, SP5 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 330.
6. Karen H. Jobes, “Who Wrote the Book of Hebrews,” ZA (blog), April 17, 2017, <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/who-wrote-the-book-of-hebrews>
7. John Stott, *The Message of Acts*, BST (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 305.
8. N. T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone: Part Two*, Chapters 13–28 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 113.
9. Michael Green, *Thirty Years that Changed the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 256.