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Acts Bible Study (The Model Church)

## Acts 18:1-19:7, When Rebaptism Is Necessary

👤 Brent Kercheville 📅 January 25, 2006

### I. Telling the Story

#### A. Paul in Corinth (18:1-17)

1. After preaching in Athens, Paul went on to Corinth. In Corinth, Paul finds a Jewish man named Aquila and his wife Priscilla. They had recently left Rome because emperor Claudius had expelled all the Jews from the city. This gives us a dating of these events at approximately 49 A.D. Paul stays with Aquila and Priscilla and works with them because they all have the same occupation: tentmaking. Every Sabbath Paul went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews and Greek, trying to persuade them concerning Jesus.
2. But as has been common in the cities where Paul has preached, the Jews begin to be violently upset with Paul's teaching. In verse 6 we read that the Jews resisted Paul's preaching and began to be abusive against him. It becomes evident that Paul is tired of having this reception of the gospel from the Jews. The Jews were to be the people of God who were looking for the Messiah. When Paul preaches the good news that the Messiah had come, they repeatedly abused and tried to kill him. In verse 6, Paul shakes off his clothes in protest to the Jews and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads. I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles."

3. We are told the good news that many Corinthians believed in the Lord and were baptized, including the leader of the synagogue, Crispus. To encourage Paul, the Lord comes to him in a vision telling him not to be afraid but to keep speaking to the inhabitants of the city. Paul, therefore, stayed in Corinth for a year and a half, teaching the word of God among them. We see from this that all of us can be worn down from rejection. Even Paul needed encouraging words from God to stay in Corinth and the knowledge that no one would lay a hand on him. Let us be thoughtful to give encouraging words to each other to keep serving, to keep aiding others, and to keep trying to teach others.
4. Though Paul was told that no one would lay a hand on him, Paul's faith in those words were put to the test. The Jews made a united attack against Paul and brought him before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia. The Jews make the charge, "This man is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law." But before Paul can make a defense, Gallio immediately dismisses the charges as a waste of time. Gallio points out that the dispute is about words and names. I believe this means that Gallio realizes that the dispute is simply about if Jesus is the Messiah or not. Gallio does not care if Jesus is or is not and immediately releases Paul. The Greeks who watched this event become a mob and beat the ruler of the synagogue, but Gallio did not take notice.
5. Our faith in God's words will be put to the test. God told Paul "no one is going to attack and harm you" (NIV). Two verses later we read "the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him into court" (NIV). I know I would have been thinking in my mind, "I thought you said I would not be attacked and harmed." It seemed that Paul's end result was going to be the same in the other cities, where Paul would be tried, beaten, and imprisoned. But Paul maintained his faith in God's words. We also have a very difficult challenge when we read the words that "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength" (1 Corinthians 10:13; NRSV). Our faith in those words will be put to the test. When God says that he will never abandon us nor forsake us, our faith in those words will be put to the test. We must always remember that God is faithful and his words are true. We can have confidence in God's promises.

## B. Apollos in Ephesus (18:18-28)

1. Paul returns to Antioch after a couple more stops along the way. Paul then went through the regions of Galatia and Phrygia strengthening the disciples along the way. At this moment, the scene changes and we begin to follow the activities of a Jew named Apollos. Apollos was from Alexandria and came to Ephesus. He was a learned man with a very thorough knowledge of the

Scriptures. Apollos had been instructed in the way of the Lord, spoke with great fervor, and taught about Jesus accurately. However, there is one problem: he only knew about the baptism of John.

2. Apollos began to speak boldly in the synagogue and Aquila and Priscilla heard him speak. They invited Apollos into their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. I find it interesting that Aquila and Priscilla did not cause a ruckus in the synagogue about his teaching. Aquila and Priscilla did not label Apollos a false teacher and call for Paul to label him as a trend leading toward apostasy among the first century churches. They did not even set up a debate. Aquila and Priscilla have Apollos into their home and explained God's way to him. Surely we can see that this is an example for us on how to deal with those that we disagree with in regards to the scriptures. Rather than shoot first and ask questions later, how about we invite the person into our home and simply discuss the matter of doctrine in question? While Apollos was teaching Jesus correctly, he was not teaching the method of salvation correctly. So this is a serious problem and no small issue. Yet, the proper way to engage the problem was to have the person over and talk about it calmly and rationally.

## C. Paul in Ephesus

1. While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul went to Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" They respond that they had not heard that there is a Holy Spirit. Paul then asks what baptism they received and the disciples respond that they were baptized with John's baptism. Paul explains that John's baptism was for repentance, looking toward the one coming after him, Jesus.
2. Upon hearing these words, the disciples are baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. After their baptism, Paul lays hands on the disciples and the Holy Spirit came upon them, giving them the gifts of speaking in other languages and prophecy.

## II. The Need For Rebaptism

### A. False reasons for rebaptism

1. This is the only example we know of in the scriptures where we see people being baptized again. Let us discuss the similarities between John's baptism and baptism in the name of Jesus so we can fully understand why rebaptism of these disciples was necessary.
2. Same Form. We know that the form of baptism was the same. It is not that the disciples in Ephesus had been sprinkled with water, which is not the baptism of the New Testament. John's

baptism was immersion in water, just like the baptism in the name of Jesus is immersion in water. There is not a difference in form that would bring the necessity for rebaptism.

3. Not a location problem. The reason these disciples had to be rebaptized was not because of the location of John's baptism. It did not matter that these people had been baptized in the wilderness where John was preaching. It was not necessary to be baptized in the pools of Jerusalem or in the Jordan River. Where a person is immersed in water does not matter. It does not matter if the waters used are a public swimming pool, a private spa, or a canal. It does not matter if the waters of a denomination's church building are used or if the building used by a sound church is used. How will we know who is sound and who is not sound? By a church directory? By asking a series of questions? Notice that Paul does not ask the disciples where they were baptized! These were not the issues surrounding these disciples' rebaptism.
4. Not an issue about the baptizer . Also consider that Paul does not ask "who baptized you." This may have been our assumption when the problem is presented to Paul. We may have expected Paul to say, "You have not heard of the Holy Spirit. Who baptized you?" But the person doing the baptism is not at issue either. It cannot matter who is the one doing the baptism, otherwise we would must trace the baptizers all the way back to the apostles. We would need to have a family tree showing how the person who baptized the baptizer was a true Christian, and how the person who baptized the baptizer who baptized the baptizer was a true Christian, and so on. The religious and spiritual beliefs of the baptizer are not important.
5. Not the words said at baptism . Paul does not ask what was said during the baptism. There are some today trying to make a distinction between being baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. There is not a set formula of words to be said at baptism, else such a formula would have been commanded by our Lord and his apostles.

## B. Reason for rebaptism

1. So what then is the real reason as to why these twelve disciples had to be rebaptized? We must carefully read Acts 19:4 to know the answer. "Paul said, 'John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.'"
2. While correct at the time of John's preaching, these disciples were baptized with the faith that there was going to be one to come who would take away their sins. Since Jesus had come in the flesh, died and resurrected, their baptism was now based upon an improper faith. They were

baptized looking forward to the day when the Savior would come and make a sacrifice to take away their sins. They did not believe this had happened yet when they were baptized. They need to believe that Jesus is the Christ and he is the one taking sins away.

3. To put this into our 21<sup>st</sup> century world, I believe its application is to be used with those people who have been baptized, but were not baptized with the proper faith that their sins were being washed away. Just as these disciples in Acts 19 believed that forgiveness would come later with the Messiah, we have many today who believe they have been forgiven prior to baptism. If we do not know what is taking place when we are baptized, the scriptures point to this as a very serious thing.
4. You may have been baptized by your parents as an infant. But as an infant you were unable to believe in Jesus Christ and believe your sins were being forgiven. According to the example of Acts 19, it is necessary for you to be baptized with the proper faith. Perhaps you were baptized out of peer pressure. Maybe your friends were all being baptized at a camp or your parents were pushing you to be baptized. If you did not have the proper heart and faith that you were submitting your life to Jesus and asking him to forgive you, then you need to be baptized with the proper faith.
5. Baptism is not about the water, which is Peter's point in 1 Peter 3:21. It is not about being sure you got wet. The baptism is simply an external act, just as much as singing or partaking of the Lord's Supper. What is important is not only the act, but our hearts during the act. What we believe during the act is very important. What our hearts are doing while we sing is crucial to acceptable worship. We are told to sing, making melody in our hearts to the Lord. What we are thinking in our hearts while we partake of the Lord's Supper is very important. This is why Paul commanded that we examine ourselves to ensure we partake in a worthy manner.
6. In the same way, it is what we believe in our hearts when we are baptized that is important. It is not the act itself. Without the heart and proper faith, baptism is just an external act that is meaningless. We must believe that we are asking God to take away our sins and that they are being removed in baptism. We have to have a repentant, submissive heart when we are baptized. The other things we discussed do not matter, but our faith and our belief concerning our baptism absolutely matters. I believe this is the problem with the disciples in Acts 19. They did not believe their sins were being removed by the blood of Jesus. They believed their sins would be removed in the future when the Messiah came.

7. Finally, we must accept the importance of baptism. If baptism is optional, then it does not make any sense for these disciples to be baptized again. If faith alone is sufficient, then baptism should not have been performed. We see again in the book of Acts that baptism is the method God uses to unite us in the death and resurrection of Jesus to wash our sins away.

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