

The Gospel and Baptism

Acts 18.24-19.7

January 28

In the focal passage of our study, Luke narrated two vignettes from the church at Ephesus which highlighted issues of faulty understanding of the gospel.

What does Luke teach about the nature of the gospel? What is the relationship between the gospel and baptism?

First, church planting and gospel proclamation function best with a team approach. When Paul arrived in Corinth, he encountered a Jewish-Christian couple (Aquila and Priscilla) that recently came from Rome because of the Emperor Claudius' action of expelling Jews from Rome due to disturbances among the Jews regarding the Christ (from Suetonius, a Roman historian). In Corinth, Paul and the couple partnered with the apostle in trade and synagogue ministry (Acts 18.1-3). The couple accompanied Paul on his journey from Corinth to Ephesus (Acts 18.18) and left the ministering couple in Ephesus as he journeyed for Palestine. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians from Ephesus and mentioned that the Ephesian church met in their house (1 Cor. 16.19).

Second, even Christian leaders need maturing in understanding the nature of the gospel and baptism (Acts 18.24-28). Apollos, a Jewish believer from Alexandria, arrived in Ephesus and began preaching in the synagogue. Luke described Apollos as eloquent, knowledgeable about the Old Testament, fervent in his preaching (or fervent in the Spirit), and accurate in preaching according to the knowledge he possessed. Apollos, however, lacked sufficient knowledge regarding the meaning of Christian baptism. Aquila and Priscilla privately instructed Apollos in a correct understanding. Apollos's knowledge of baptism was limited to the baptismal teachings of John the Baptist. According to Luke 3, John the Baptist preached a message of baptism focused on crucial truths: inclusion among God's people does not depend on ethnicity (Lk. 3.8), baptism was connected with the coming kingdom of the Messiah (Lk. 3.16-17), baptism was a symbol of repentance leading to a changed lifestyle (Lk. 3.8), and baptism pointed to the ministry of Jesus the Messiah – the rejection of whom results in judgment (Matt. 3.11). Likely, Apollos lacked knowledge of the connection of John's baptism with the message of the coming Messiah. Perhaps Aquila and Priscilla explained the relationship between John's baptism and Jesus. In any case, the role of the couple was instruction about the meaning of baptism and not "rebaptizing" Apollos. The Bible does not describe the rebaptism of the disciples of Jesus after receiving baptism from John. As a preacher to Jews and Gentiles in Ephesus and Corinth, Apollos needed to understand the meaning of baptism.

Third, people baptized with an inadequate faith should receive true baptism (Acts 19.1-7). In Ephesus, Paul encountered twelve individuals with inadequate faith. Luke narrates three problem areas in the faith of these men familiar with some aspects of the teachings of John the Baptist. First, the men lacked knowledge of the Baptist's message about the Holy Spirit (Acts 19.2b). John taught of a coming one who would baptize people "in" the Spirit (Lk. 3.16). Readers of the Old Testament possess some knowledge of the Spirit. Paul taught the inseparableness of the Spirit and being a Christian, "If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him" (Rom. 8.9). Second, the men lacked knowledge of the Messiah John the Baptist proclaimed." Rather than pointing to himself, John instructed people to believe in the One coming after him, that is Jesus (Acts 19.4). Luke referred to these men as "some disciples" without the definite article, as in, "the disciples." In his Gospel, Luke noted that some individuals were "disciples" of John the Baptist (Lk. 5.33; 7.8; 11.1). (A movement committed to following John the Baptist existed in history until the fourth century.) After learning of Jesus, the One John proclaimed, these men came to faith in Christ and received baptism.