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The Early Church Clarified

Acts 18:18 - 19:7

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PowerPoint Presentation included: none

SermonAudio Blurb: Often in the spiritual journey of every Christian there are times where things become more clear. This often comes through hearing doctrine taught well and it causes a person to make a key adjustment regarding what they believe. Sometimes it comes through life experiences as well. Certain things happening that make the person rethink and adjust what they understand. This section describes three different times in the early church where things became clarified.

I. Introduction.

- A. Read 18:18 - 19:10
- B. Often we make adjustments about how we perceive things after we receive additional information, which often brings clarity to a difficult situation.
- C. Transition: Truth is the ultimate clarifier.

- D. Today I want to show you three ways that God brought about clarity in the lives of Paul, Apollos and several unnamed believers. And in doing so, I hope that you will also realize that God is continuing to bring clarity and adjustments to our church and in our individual lives.

II. Three Points of Clarity.

- A. Paul's point of clarity (18:18-23).
 - 1. Paul's haircut and vow.
 - a. We are not certain about the vow due to the word choice by Luke. But it was most likely the nazirite vow.
 - b. This is described in Numbers 6 and it was a unique vow made to God by Jews. It was not mandatory, rather, it was purely voluntary.

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- c. The fact he did this when leaving Corinth prior to boarding a ship in Cenchrea, suggests that during his time in Corinth he had taken this vow, something to which the Jewish population would see and appreciate.
- d. Romans 11:13 he calls himself the apostle to the Gentiles.
 - (1) Vs 14 shows part of the motive in this work of his.
 - (2) Remember the words Paul wrote at the end of Roman 11 (30-36). Even as he was writing this letter to the church in Rome he is seeing even more clearly the mysterious way God works.
2. Paul's initial journey to Ephesus (18:19-21).
 - a. We see now that he is in the city of Ephesus. This would become a key locale for him in the near future. And we find him still doing his normal practice of going to the synagogue.
 - b. In common decision-making terminology what happened in vs 20 would be considered an "open door."
 - c. A side note of possible interest: vs 19 has Paul leaving Aquila and Priscilla and going to the synagogue. We know from 1 Corinthians 16:19 that they actually had a house in Ephesus as well and it became a meeting place for part of the church in Corinth. Likely, what they did was simply go to their home while Paul took care of business.
3. Paul then boarded a ship which eventually came to Caesarea, then to Antioch where this journey comes to an end.

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4. If you look at a map of Paul's 2nd journey and compare it with other maps, you may notice that some show him going to Antioch from Caesarea, while others show him visiting Jerusalem even though it is not mentioned.
 5. Notice the words in vs 22, "he went up and greeted the church."

 6. Vs 23 then describes the beginning of his **3rd missionary** journey, where he goes back through the area he had already visited and planted churches.
 7. So, with Paul, we see him shedding a bit of his Jewish culture in ending his vow.
 8. Now we will see a different sort of clarity in the life of Apollos.
- B. Apollos's point of clarity (18:24-28).
1. In vss 24-28 we see the next event, where a key individual has his faith clarified and brought to maturity. Luke takes us back into Ephesus and focuses on this man, Apollos.

 2. This man was from Egypt, so he would have been one of the many who were raised outside of Israel.
 - a. Note that he was fervent in spirit.
 - (1) This likely refers not to his own spirit, rather, it was the presence of the Holy Spirit. In other words, his preaching and teaching were done in the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - (2) Notice also he was careful to be accurate with what he taught.

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- (3) Finally, at the end of vs 24, his grasp of the Old Testament scripture was described as “powerful.”
- (4) But this is where things became a bit off.
- 3. As Aquila and Priscilla began to talk to him and listen to his teaching they began to see that there was something off.
 - a. He was accurate about the gospel. That was fine. But as they listened to him and watched him in action, they would see how he presented the gospel in real life.
 - b. And it would be in those moments that they would realize what was missing. He did not know about the Christian rite of baptism and therefore it would be missing as part of the response to the gospel.
 - c. He knew of the one taught by John the Baptist, but not the Christian one.
 - d. This is his moment of clarity, through the kind work of this couple he was able to understand the effects of the gospel better.
 - e. What stands out in this little story for me is how Apollos was teachable.
 - (1) He did not know it all and was open to being instructed.
 - (2) But also I think we see the reality of the Holy Spirit in bringing a person into maturity.
- C. Ephesian disciples’ point of clarity (19:1-7).
 - 1. Here we are now in the third missionary journey of Paul. He has returned to Ephesus and here he will stay for quite some time. So he is now trying

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to get his head around all that has happened while he was gone and this is where Luke picks up the story.

2. Once again, we come to another one of those unique moments you only find in Acts. And it causes me to again remind you that Acts is a book of transitions and that caution must be used when reading it.
3. We have Paul in Ephesus and he comes across disciples, 12 in number (7).
4. The question I have for you is this, disciples of what/whom? How you answer that question will then determine the meaning of the passage.
5. These men were not yet Christians, or men of The Way. Nor are they like Apollos either. They were also “in between.” But in a different way from Apollos.

6. He finds out what they are and what they know and believe. And this is something we need to do ourselves today. Many who have gone to church and never actually heard or understood the actual gospel.

7. What is meant in vs 2 “receive the Holy Spirit?” 1 Corinthians 12:13 says that all who are Christians are baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ, in other words, into the church.
 - a. But in the early church how was this seen?
 - b. On a few occasions once they believed it would be obvious because they would speak in tongues (languages) and prophesying.

 - c. So what does Paul do?
 - (1) He basically explains about the person and work of Jesus and sums it up by saying, "The messiah John was telling everyone is Jesus."
 - (2) And immediately they shift their faith from the future coming of Jesus to the present belief that He has come, died and rose again.

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- (3) Clarity in their faith.
- (4) And once baptized, they gave evidence of the Holy Spirit by tongues and prophesy. This is not the normal result and Acts does not teach that it is normal. It happens only in a few situations that are unique as the gospel began to go outward.

III. Conclusion.

- A. Where does this intersect with us?
- B. Each of us find ourselves somewhere on a spectrum of knowledge, faith and godliness.
 1. No one has “arrived.” But often we can act like we have. And in that, we find ourselves stuck, spiritually speaking.
 2. We saw three vignettes of change today. One very mature believer. One very powerful teacher who was still missing part of the message. And 12 disciples who were following the wrong person but in the best of intentions.
 3. Wisdom tells us to seek to always be growing, changing into the likeness of our Lord.
- C. But also, I see a need for us to be wise as we talk to people. To not put saving faith and saving knowledge in their mouths.
 1. To listen wisely, not to find error as much as find what is actually believed.
 2. Many could have just accepted Apollos or the other disciples as being sound in their beliefs. But they were not. And they needed help, and it is very possible that God has placed some people in your life to be that very help.
- D. So, seek to be sound in the faith. Seek to know doctrine well. And as you speak, learn to listen through a solid, biblical grid that causes you to be a genuine help to those to whom you talk.

Benediction

May we stand firm against the spiritual powers that press upon us in the strength of the Lord and in His might. May we take up the full armor of God so that we might resist and stand fast in these evil days. May we walk in the peace that comes through the gospel of Jesus Christ and we live in the power of the Spirit to the glory of the Father. Amen.