**Special Presentation**

Acts 19:1-10

The Rev. Jeff Stivason, Ph.D.

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**Jeff:** All right. This morning I want us to talk about this. Your outline says “The Happy Home.” But “The Happy Home” is a leftover from a previous talk that I did. But you could actually say that it is a happy home that we’re going to talk about, because we want to talk about our work of unity. And certainly we are mindful of the work of unity that the church needs to endeavor to embody. And so another title that we could give to it is “Paul, Apollos and Baptism.” And that really gets to the heart and to the nitty-gritty of what we’re going to talk about today.

And so I want us to turn to Acts chapter 19, and I want us to look at verses 1-10. But in looking at verses 1-10 this is going to become a place where we settle for a little bit. We’re actually going to go back into chapter 18, and we’re going to go forward into 1 Corinthians. So we’re going to be in a few different places today. And hopefully being in those places will make sense after we begin to tie the theme together. But for the sake of reading a larger passage and setting that before us early, let’s look at Acts chapter 19, and let me read you verses 1-10. This is the word of the living God.

*“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?’ And they said, ‘Into John’s baptism.’*

*“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.”*

Well, there are a number of things that we might talk about today with regard to this and its setting in the book of Acts. But I basically have four things that I want us to think about. I want us to think about an introduction. I want us to think about a setting in particular, and that takes us back into chapter 18; I’ll talk to you about that in a minute.

I want to talk about the issue. There’s an issue that’s apparent but not named in the setting. And so I want to talk about that. And then I want us to talk about Paul’s letter. And the letter that I’m talking about is the first letter to the Corinthians.

There are a number of things that I’m hoping that you see in this. One of them is a sort of interrelatedness, a sort of a background thing. I hope you see the interrelatedness between the book of Acts and the letters that were written during and around that time so that, for instance, you can fit many of Paul’s epistles into the book of Acts. They have context, and we’re going to look at some of that context.

So first of all let’s look at the introduction. And by way of introduction I simply want to talk to you. In thinking about unity I want you to remember that there was never a golden age of the church. There was never a time in the life of the church where you could say, “Boy, I wish we could have that.” For instance the Reformation, though it was a wonderful period, no one ought to want to go back to the Reformation. As Christians we are not de-eschatologizing life, but we are eschatological in our focus. That is, we are forward-moving in our focus. We don’t want to return to some golden age; we want to look forward to the golden age.

And the reason I say that is because some people have a tendency to say, “Well I just want to get back to the New Testament church.” And by that they mean that was the time where it was sort of golden and beautiful and there were no problems, and if we could just reach back to that we would be fine. Well, that’s not the case. Let me give you a couple of examples just to kind of set this in context.

Think about the letter to the Philippians. The letter to the Philippians is supposed to be the letter of joy; at least that’s what Chuck Swindoll called it for years. But let me remind you of something. In the letter to the Philippians you have those who preached the gospel out of envy while Paul is in prison. For instance in 2:3-5 you have a division.

**Transcriber’s Note:** Philippians 2:3-5, NKJV. *“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”*

**Jeff:** And so Paul calls them to have the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. In 2:25 we find that there was a man whose name was Epaphroditus, and Epaphroditus had fallen ill. And some believe that in falling ill he had disappointed the sending church. Paul now had to take care of him, and so he became a burden to Paul. He’s encouraging them to receive Epaphroditus back into their midst.

And then you find in 4:2-3 that there are two ladies in the midst, Euodia and Syntyche who are fighting and at odds with one another. And so Paul is saying, “Look; help these women to reconcile one to another.”

So in the letter to the Philippians alone—this letter of joy—we find that there are tense relationships. And these things need to be dealt with in the gospel.

And now to 1 Corinthians. Let me just mention this at the outset. We’ll come back here, but I want you to notice that there are tense relationships here. In 1:10: *“I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you.”* And the problem is that there are divisions.

And in 3:1 he says, “Look, I can’t talk to you as mature; I have to talk to you as infants.” In chapter 6 they were taking each other to the law courts. In chapter 11 they were eating without one another at the Lord’s Supper. Things were not going well and the church in those early days was having its difficulties. And they were constantly dealing with the disunity that was in the congregations. So we just need to keep that in mind.

And so when I talk to you today about this particular issue I want you to be thinking with me about the fact that this isn’t a one-off. This kind of problem was alive and well in different contexts in the first-century church.

Now with that in mind I want us to think about the setting. Now when you think about the book of Acts, one of the things that you at least do at the outset is, you think about it in terms of missionary journeys. Paul had three missionary journeys. And if you want to track with me, the first missionary journey begins in Acts chapter 13 inverse 4. *“So being sent out, they went down to Seleucia,”* and so on. Tso his is Paul and Barnabas; that’s their first missionary journey.

The first journey basically wraps up at the end of chapter 14 verse 26. *“And from there they sailed to Antioch.”* That’s their home base. So they sail back to their home base.

And then there’s the Jerusalem Council. But it’s after the Jerusalem Council where you see that they go out on the second missionary journey which is in 15:36.

**Transcriber’s Note:** Acts 15:36, NKJV. *“Then after some days Paul said to Barnabas, ‘Let us now go back and visit every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they are doing.”*

**Jeff:** And so here Paul and Barnabas had a split, which is another form of disunity within the church. But Paul and Silas end up going on the second missionary journey together. And so the end of the second missionary journey comes at the midpoint in chapter 18. Notice verse 22: *“When he landed at Caesarea he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch.”* And so that’s the end of the journey.

And then in verse 23 here’s the end of the second missionary journey. *“And after spending some time there, he departed.”* And that’s the beginning of the third missionary journey. And so that is basically the beginning and the ending point of the three missionary journeys that Paul goes on. The third missionary journey basically comes to an end when Paul heads back to Jerusalem in 21:17.

**Transcriber’s Note:** Acts 21:17, NKJV. *“And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.”*

**Jeff:** But there he’s arrested and taken to Rome, so that’s kind of the configuration. Now I want us to think about the second missionary journey. I actually want us to think about a latter part of that particular journey, the latter part of it. I want you to think about this. I want to start broadly and then I want us to move in a little bit.

So starting broadly here we find Paul. And he goes up to Antioch after the Jerusalem Council, and he makes his way through Galatia. And in making his way through Galatia he goes to Troas. He goes over Neapolis that’s in Philippi. You remember that they have a woman who is following them around with the python spirit saying that these are the men of the Most High God. They find themselves in jail because they exorcise the spirit from the woman. Her handlers find out they can no longer make money from her. They have them thrown in prison; they’re flogged, they’re beaten and then released.

They go down to Amphipolis, Appolonia, Thessalonica and Berea. Paul is in Athens in chapter 17. And then after chapter 17, after Athens, he moves to Corinth. And this is where after sending people back to Thessalonica they discover that people are okay, and they move on. So they go to Corinth, then to Cenchrea, then to Ephesus and then back home.

Now what I want you to narrow in on with me is that I want you to notice that while in Corinth—this is after Athens, after Acts chapter 17,---he goes to Corinth in chapter 18. So while in Corinth he meets a husband and wife. The husband and wife are Aquila and Priscilla. Famous folks; you know them well.

And let’s just notice this. *“After this Paul left Athens, went to Corinth, and he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius”*—that’s the emperor,--*“had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.”*

All right. Now this is the Claudian expulsion. And the Claudian expulsion results. We actually have extra-Biblical/historical documentation of this. Suetonius tells us that Claudius had grown tired of all the fighting that was taking place amidst the Jews, because remember, at this time they didn’t differentiate the Jews from the Christians. They saw Christians as part of a sect of Jews.

And so Claudius said, “You know what? I’m tired of all this infighting of the Jews. I’m expelling you; you guys are going to be exiled.” And so he pushes them out.

The interesting thing about this is that Aquila is from Pontus. And if you remember, Pontus is one of the five places to which Peter writes in his first epistle. And this place of five geographical regions is geographically about the size of California. And this is the place that was populated the most with exiles by Claudius under his reign. It’s interesting that Priscilla and Aquila are part of the expulsion. He’s from Pontus. They probably don’t go back to Pontus. They probably start out, because back in those days they weren’t going to track you; they’re gonna just get rid of you. Some of them would be carried off, but it depended on you. These people probably skirted off and made their way around that, but he’s from that area.

So Paul meets these people. And notice that if you trace them through here it’s probably likely that Aquila and Priscilla go to Cenchrea with Paul, and then they go on to Ephesus. Now just notice this with me. Go to verse 18. And mind you, Paul was in Corinth about a year-and-a-half; we find that in verse 11.

But in verse 18, *“After this Paul stayed many days longer and then took leave of the brothers, and set sail for Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila.”* Now look at this. They leave Corinth and go to Cenchrea. Let me just throw the map up really quick. They leave Corinth; that’s where they meet. They go to Cenchrea, and then they’re gonna go on to Ephesus. At Cenchrea was where he had his hair cut under a vow. And then verse 19: *“They came into Ephesus, and he left them there.”*

So Paul leaves Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus. He then will eventually head home to Antioch. Now that brings you to the end of Paul’s second missionary journey.

But think about it. We’re going to learn about Aquila and Priscilla. Aquila and Priscilla were left in Ephesus. And it’s there that they meet a man in verse 24, and his name is Apollos. *“Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus.”*

Now Alexandria is a coastal city in the northernmost part of Egypt, and it is a scholarly city of the ancient world. In fact we’re talking about the quintessential scholarly world. When Alexander first went there and laid out the plan for the city and left it he didn’t come back to it until he died, and one of his generals abducted his body as it was going through Syria, and brought him back to Alexandria because the general knew that to have the body of Alexander was to be the preeminent general out of the midst of the four that are going to rule over his empire.

So he brings him back and builds up this wonderful city. It was under Ptolemais II where the city thrived the most. I think it was under Ptolemais III that it might have started to decline. And when Caesar ended up being there with Cleopatra it ended up that most of the library was burned, so it was a very tragic situation. But Apollos was from that city.

And notice: This is a man who seems like he is quite scholarly. He spoke and taught the Word accurately. Now let me just read this section to you. Verse 24: *“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, thought he knew only the baptism of John. 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.”*

Now he’s going to desire to go elsewhere *“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 the powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.”*

Now what was the problem? What was the thing that they had to adjust with Aquila and Priscilla What was the thing that they had to adjust in his theology? I mean, he understood the Way accurately he fought, he refuted. There was one problem. And that problem is not necessarily named. It may be named. But sometimes people come away from this text thinking: What was the problem with his theology?

Well I’m going to suggest to you that the problem is named. And I’m going to suggest to you that the problem was that he only knew the baptism of John. That was the issue that they explained to him.

Now keep in mind that I think you have to understand that this man taught. And until he came to Priscilla and Aquila his teaching had not been adjusted, which means there is no social media, there’s no Twitter. There is nothing to kind of shoot it out: Hey, here’s a correction in my theology, right? He’s been teaching and he’s an eloquent teacher, and he’s being taught. And what’s being taught, at least the implication is, that he only knew the baptism of John. That’s the issue.

Now notice this. Apollos left Ephesus and went on to Corinth. Notice this in verse 19: *“And it happened 3that while Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus.”* So Luke has made a point to tell us that Aquila and Priscilla were in Ephesus and encounter Apollos and corrected him. He goes on to Corinth and Paul now comes into Ephesus. And while Paul is in Ephesus what did he find? He found only those who knew the baptism of John. Isn’t that interesting! He encountered those who had been taught by Apollos; that’s my assumption, okay? Yes, John?

**John Gratner:** When we use this phrase “the baptism of John,” what do we mean by that?

**Jeff:** Yes. What we mean is—and we’re actually going to tie into this,--what we mean is here’s the issue, and let’s set it up like this. The question is, what is the baptism of John? And let’s put Christian baptism on this side. Does the baptism of John equal Christian baptism? Is it the same as Christian baptism, or is it not equal? In other words, is it something entirely different from Christian baptism? Or is it not necessarily equal to it but not entirely different from Christian baptism?

Now you get people who fall all over the place in those three divisions. Usually you get people who say that it’s not equal because people will basically say that there was a form of proselyte baptism that the Jews practiced. And this was basically what John the Baptist had taken on as a practice himself. And I find little evidence for that.

There are others who say that it’s not the same as Christian baptism, but it’s not entirely different. And what they will say is that John’s baptism is not rooted in proselyte baptism, but it’s rooted in Old Testament ceremonial washings. But it’s not the same as Christian baptism. And they will usually say that it’s not the same as Christian baptism because Jesus hasn’t come, and so on and so forth.

And then you get others who say no. As a forerunner of Jesus here we find a man who was of the Old Testament period, taking that which was of the old and shadowy type—that is, the washing of Ezekiel 33,--and now applying it to a New Testament context in anticipation of the coming of Jesus Christ. In character it’s the same as Christian baptism. And so you have those three basic positions.

Now what I’m gonna do is, I want to show you something in the text, and then we can begin to talk about this if you’d like. So let’s go to chapter 19, and let’s begin to read it.

*“Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”* That’s Paul’s first one. *“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.’”*

*Now here’s what Paul says to them.* “And Paul said, ‘John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling people to believe in the One who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.”

*Now notice that the quotation mark is right before John and right after Jesus.* “Now on hearing this, they.” *Who are “they?”* They are those who Paul is speaking to in Ephesus. *“And they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”*

Now that’s how our English renders it, okay? Now the question is: Is there a better solution? And let me suggest to you that a different solution comes from the fact that in reading the text it looks like this.

**Don Maurer:** Looks like what?

**Jeff:** It looks like what I have on the board, Don. Stop sleeping. *(Laughter)* It’s a picture of a Greek text. It’s an ancient text; it’s P66, Papyrus 66.

**Don:** Okay.

**Jeff:** And all of the words are running together.

**Ted:** All the letters re running together; there are no upper case or lower case letters.

**Jeff:** Okay. Now that means that there is no punctuation in this text. That means that your English text has punctuation inserted by people who are translating the text, which means that when I offer this next solution to you I’m offering to you a different punctuation and not a different Greek text.

So let’s take a look at it; let’s look at a different punctuation. *“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.”*

No punctuation. *“On hearing this they.”* Now who are they? They are those John was speaking to. *“And they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.”* Punctuation mark. In other words, that punctuation would equate John’s baptism to Christian baptism.

And then what happens next? What happens next is in verse 6. *“And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them.”* In other words, the baptism is performed by John. But the explanation of what that is is given by Paul. There is no re-baptism; there is a laying on of hands for them to receive the Holy Spirit.

Now let me say this to you. In what sense should we think about the Holy Spirit? Well I’m going to suggest to you that this gets into something else; actually we may not get into something else. Maybe we ought to stay with this for a minute and then kind of work through it. Let’s do that, and then if we have to go there we’ll go there.

So I think what the issue is is that Paul is dealing with this teaching from Apollos that they only knew the baptism of John, and Paul is correcting that. He’s talking to them and teaching them about what that baptism is. And I think the conclusion is that Paul is correcting Apollos; Paul is straightening out Apollos here. Go ahead.

**Brave Man:** What happened is that they came to an understanding of the centrality of Christ and salvation, and they recognized the Holy Spirit. I understand that your punctuation is different, but you have the word “baptized” in there again. How do you explain it away?

**Jeff:** How do I explain what away?

**Brave Man:** Well there appears to be a second baptism. You’re taking the period right out of that sentence and going right on to *“On hearing this.”* The Holy Spirit came u0pon them in one sentence. That seems to be what you’re saying. They didn’t understand it, but they understood it when the Holy Spirit came upon them.

**Jeff:** Well you could easily understand that to say, “On hearing this, they were baptized.” In other words, they understood their baptism to be in the name of the Lord Jesus.

**Brave Man:** But it’s confusing.

**Jeff:** See, let me bring in this other point for a minute here. I think that what we’re dealing with in the book of Acts is something that is different from what we would understand. For instance Pentecostals, as an example, would understand the book of Acts much differently than I would understand it.

What do I mean? For instance I mean that Jesus’ death, His burial, His resurrection, His ascension, His outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost and His cession are all one-time, unrepeatable events. And what we have from His death, burial and resurrection is the account that the Gospels give. His ascension and cession and the outpouring of the Spirit is the account that Acts gives. And Acts gives us what Pentecost is: the outpouring of the Spirit. And that is a one-time, unrepeatable event. Acts is no more repeatable than is the Resurrection. In other words, what we have in the book of Acts is an account of the outpouring of the Spirit.

And you see the paradigm of that. Acts 1:8 gives the paradigm that the effects of this outpouring will be in *“Jerusalem, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”* And that’s what we find in the book of Acts; that’s the program It’s not a biography of Peter, it’s not a biography of Paul. It’s a biography of this program: that the gospel goes from Jerusalem, through Samaria and to the ends of the earth; that’s this kind of movement. And each time it moves into this new place the same thing happens. The people receive the Holy Spirit and mimic the signs that were first given in Acts chapter 2. And when the book of Acts ends, that’s what we understand to be the outpouring of the Spirit.

Now here’s the interesting thing. There is a word that describes the filling of the Spirit.

**Transcriber’s Note:** A Greek word.

**Jeff:** This word is used in the book of Acts. It’s only used two times in the Gospels. But in the book of Acts it is used to describe the filling of the Spirit. It is the synonym of another Greek word which is not used in the book of Acts to describe the filling of the Spirit. But afterwards it is used in the Epistles to describe the filling of the Christian.

The difference is that this (first) word seems to be used to describe this outpouring of the Spirit, this Pentecost experience. But after this Pentecost experience that describes the infilling of the Christian, the (other) word is used.

So I want to say that what is happening here is not an explanation of the one baptism of John, but the laying on of hands in order to fulfill the Pentecost aspect of it. Okay? Now do you want to let that go, or—Yes?

**Ron Baling:** Are you saying then that that the baptizing of the Lord Jesus was not a separate act apart from the laying on of hands to receive the Spirit?

**Jeff:** What I’m saying is that Paul is explaining that in receiving John’s baptism that they were baptized with Christian baptism. And then he lays his hands on them and they receive the Spirit; the outpouring of the Spirit occurs.

**Ted:** But did John baptize in the name of the Lord Jesus?

**Jeff:** John baptized with a baptism of repentance. They didn’t call it Christian baptism. But he baptized in the One who was to come after him.

**Ted:** Oh, I see. Right, okay.

**Don Maurer:** There is something that confuses me a little bit, because Paul says in Romans and other places that immediately when we are united to Christ we receive the Holy Spirit, whether we’ve been baptized or not. So here in Acts 19 Paul says, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit?” Well, didn’t they? If they were Christians, did they not receive the Holy Spirit?

**Jeff:** See, I think we’re talking about two different things. I think that what we’re talking about in Acts is the Pentecost outpouring of the Spirit, and not the typical regenerative work of the Spirit that is a description of what every Christian possesses.

**Don:** Mm-hmm. Okay. That clears it up.

**Jeff:** Yes, John?

**John:** Go back to 18:25 and the description here about Apollos.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**John:** He was instructed in the way of the Lord, being fervent in spirit. He was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus.

**Jeff:** Yes.

**John:** Being acquainted only with the baptism of John. As opposed to a correction, might this be more of a this be more analogous to Jesus being more than He was, in that sense? He wasn’t teaching anything inaccurately. But there was a greater understanding that Paul was bringing to this. It isn’t that he was teaching something inaccurate and needed to be corrected. It’s interesting that this teaching is almost there in the text. We find that in relation to this baptism of John and how that is different or not different.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**John:** It’s also in line with correct teaching about Jesus.

**Jeff:** Yeah. I think this is where you have to be open –and I have to be open as well as anybody else—to the possibility of correction, and say that when you see all of this kind of pushed together, and it seems to be about the baptism of John and Paul encounters that with this transitional phrase. Paul leaves for Corinth and Apollos goes to Ephesus. There does seem to be this connection that drives you to this conclusion or something like it. So how someone might sort of develop it is sort of what I think you are left to the possibility of being corrected at that point.

Let me go to the letter really quick. I think it’s interesting that when you go to the letter of 1 Corinthians what you find there. You find this church in division. Now remember, Apollos goes to Corinth, right? He goes to Corinth.

And at Corinth notice this: *“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you would be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarreling among you. My brothers, what I mean is that each of you says, ‘I follow Paul’ or ‘I follow Apollos,’ or ‘I follow Cephas’ or ‘I follow Christ.’ Is Christ divided?”*

Now go down to the next part in verse 14. *“I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius.”* It’s interesting that baptism comes at issue when people are saying, “I follow Paul” or “I follow Apollos.” *“So that no one may say that you were baptized in my name. I did baptize also the house of Stephanas; beyond that I do not know whether I baptized anyone. For Chr3ist did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with words of eloquent wisdom.”* There’s a word that describes Apollos, interestingly enough. *“Lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.”*

Notice this if you go again to chapter 3. *“For if one says, ‘I follow Paul’ and another ‘I follow Apollos,’ are you not being merely human?’”* He drops off Cephas; instead he now contrasts himself and Apollos. And it seems that the issue that’s here is an issue of baptism. And one has to wonder if it’s not this issue of what I said, what is the baptism of John.

I think one might conclude—and I just want to throw this out there,--that I think we have the tendency to think to ourselves that everybody agreed in the New Testament. And I want you to know that I think those who were inspired of the Spirit who wrote the Scriptures did agree. I think they expressed things differently. But I think that the inspired writers agreed because they had one understanding. But that doesn’t mean that Paul and Apollos had to agree. And one certainly does wonder if Apollos may not have agreed with what he had been taught about John’s baptism. He continued to teach whatever he had been teaching because he leaves Ephesus and goes to Corinth. And Paul writes this letter on his third journey to Corinth, encouraging him not to make this a matter of division among them.

I would say that it’s possible for us to think that Paul and Apollos may well have disagreed on this issue. And yet Paul is trying to focus on essential matters and not to divide over this particular issue. That could be a possible outcome or conclusion of this. When I looked at this it just struck me last month as I was looking at this text. So in one sense I’m throwing it out to you, saying that here are some initial thoughts that I had about a text that struck me as really interesting. I’m not sure I can tell you that I have it fully worked out yet. But I think it’s certainly an interesting succession of texts when you think about it. So certainly in one sense I’m really kind of saying—

**Ted:** You’re testing.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Jim Hamilton:** Thanks for confusing us. *(Laughter)*

**Ted:** On the way here I was listening to a podcast on early church history. The first podcast was down to the year 300. Generally speaking the church was unified. But there were a lot of strange things going on.

**Jeff:** Sure.

**Ted:** It backs up what you’re saying.

**Jeff:** We know that Paul talks about baptisms for the dead, and we still don’t understand that. There isn’t much information.

**Ted:** Yes.

**Jeff:** Yes, Don?

**Don Maurer:** I want to focus on unity for a minute.

**Jeff:** Yeah.

**Don:** Just like Ted pointed out, in the early church there were so many disagreements. Bringing that now to our own day, when Jesus said in John 17 *“that they may all be one as We are one,”* how does that work itself out today? Even in this room several different churches are represented. How do we solve that problem?

**Jeff:** Well, I think that our unity is founded on God’s electing grace in Christ; that’s where unity begins. I think that when Jesus prays for unity He has a successful prayer; believers are united in Him. I think that it’s incumbent on us to express the unity that He has achieved. And that is the difficulty, right? One already knows that is the difficulty at the very outset when one thinks about oneself and how one can be with others. All you have to do is think about your own self.

Now I would say to you that there are people out there who would say that denominations are sinful. And I would say to you that we ought to look at denominations as individuals. For instance, iron sharpens iron, right? Right now I am saying to you that t these are some thoughts that I have about this text. What are your thoughts about this text? And then we’re iron sharpening iron; we’re thinking about the Scriptures together. And we’re trusting the Spirit to bring us unity of thought about the things that are most essential. That’s how two people interact.

B. B. Warfield said that denominations are to ac4t in that same way. In other words, denominations are to be like individuals: iron sharpening iron. When a denomination is closed off and won’t hear from others, that church has stopped reforming according to the Scriptures. Or when a denomination has given its ear to something other than the Scriptures, that church is de-forming, right? So there are all these.

But churches ought to be speaking to one another, bearing with one another and being reformed according to Scripture, iron sharpening iron. That was the way Warfield saw it. And that’s a better way to look at denominations than to look at them as some kind of sinful schisms. Thought there may be schism at the heart of some of them, I don’t think that’s true in every case. The church grows up and sometimes merges together, and sometimes splits apart for good reasons, not bad reasons.

So I think that’s a simplistic way to say it: that denominations are just sinful. I don’t necessarily think that’s the case. I think a denomination has to be willing to listen to other denominations.

You know this as well as I do. For instance in the Reformed Church there’s a thing called NAPARC. So basically NAPARC is a group of churches that don’t entirely agree, but that get together and listen to each other about how to do things, and how each of them are navigating different issues, oftentimes adopting positions.

For instance, when the New Perspective on Paul came out, The OPC and the PCA had done work and our committee was doing work. The OPC had turned out such good work that we basically just said that there was no sense in reinventing this wheel; we’re just going to adopt that as our report. So that’s an example in my mind of unity.

**Don:** Yes.

**Jeff:** All right. I’ve got to get going. Father, thank You for this day and for the blessing of life in Christ. Lord, we ask that You’ll bless us this day. Bless Mike and give him a good day. Strengthen Your people. Help us to abound in grace and mercy and love for one another. Father, thank You for Your word. We ask that You would continue to bless us. We pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.

**Brave Men:** Amen. *(Applause)*