

Acts Chapter 19-20

Mission to Ephesus

Disciples of John

Acts 19:1-2 (ESV) **And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. 2 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.”**

So there are questions of people who are supposed to be Christians because he said ‘did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed’. The word there is believed, so are they really Christians and they did not have the Holy Spirit, so could they be Christians at that particular instant in time. This is the sequence of events.

- Conversion
- Faith
- impartation of the spirit that comes after the conversion

But this happened to the first disciples, it happened to Samaritan church and it happened to the Ephesian church right now here. Is this the way it is supposed to be? The question also is that do you have faith first and then the impartation of the spirit, some people will argue that would be the case, but if you look very closely at the disciples. Disciples when you believe. So on face value they could be believers in Jesus Christ, when you believed

The first bit of evidence, *Not heard of the Holy Spirit*.

What kind of Christians would this be if they have not even heard of the Holy Spirit? Let’s look at some passages from Old Testament.

Isaiah 44:2-3 (ESV) **Thus says the Lord who made you, who formed you from the womb and will help you: Fear not, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen. 3 For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants.**

Isaiah talks about the spirit, it can’t be there is no understanding as there is a spirit.

Ezekiel 36:26-27 (ESV) **And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.**

Again you can’t say you haven’t heard of the Holy Spirit, it is there.

Joel 2:28 (ESV) **and it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.**

So it is obvious from the Old Testament that they all are expecting this New Covenant. They are all expecting the spirit to come upon them. So when they have said that haven't heard of the Holy Spirit it probably mean that they haven't heard that the Holy Spirit has come rather than who is the Holy Spirit. So they haven't experienced coming of the Holy Spirit.

John's Baptism

Acts 19:4 (ESV) **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."**

So they have only had John's baptism which is about repentance. They are supposed to follow him out into the wilderness and then those who repent from their sin will come. So basically repenting of their sin and then he says, the one who comes will be greater than me that whose sandals I cannot even tie. I baptize in water but he will baptize in the Holy Spirit. So therefore that's the testimony of John and so they don't know about Jesus yet. They weren't baptized into Jesus they were just baptized into the repentance of John. So here you actually have John's baptism that is all they have. They believe in the one Messiah to come, they haven't heard of Jesus, so they haven't placed their faith in Jesus. They are supposed to place their faith when the Messiah comes. When they have identified the Messiah is Jesus Christ then they will place their faith in him, but have they placed their faith in Jesus Christ. If they haven't then they cannot be classified as believers in that sense. So "believers" is just generic.

So now when they are baptized in the name of Jesus they came to know who Jesus was, is, his death and resurrection. Once they understand that this Jesus is the Messiah then they were baptized into the name of Jesus and then they became true believers. So basically we have got this. This is the piece of scripture that is given to us here does not tell you that you can have belief first and then later on you get baptism of Holy Spirit. It is not necessarily separated. So this paradigm does not necessarily apply because they really weren't converted at all. If you look at the early church,

Gentile conversion in Acts chapter 10, the baptism of Holy Spirit came first. While Peter was talking to them Holy Spirit just fell on them and then they had water baptism after the baptism of Holy Spirit. Paul's conversion experience, baptism of Holy Spirit first and then only he had water baptism.

Acts 2:38 **And Peter said to them, "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."**

So it is all one package deal on Acts chapter 2 together. It does not say, repent, be baptized and then you wait for Holy Spirit to come. No, it is one package deal.

Pattern:

- Acts 2 – ask to wait for the Holy Spirit there is no laying of hands.
- Acts 10 – waiting but no laying of hands.
- Acts 8 and 19 – there is laying of hands with prayer.

So the pattern is not stable. There is no set pattern.

Acts 8:14-17 (ESV) Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, 15 who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, 16 for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 17 Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

No speaking in tongues there. There was speaking of tongues here but there is no speaking of tongues there. So speaking in tongues is not necessary in accompanying of the experience of receiving the Holy Spirit. Here in Samaritans they were not like the Ephesians. The Samaritans were different from the Ephesians; they had some sort of belief and then had baptism of Holy Spirit. The Samaritans were baptized in the name of Jesus, if they were baptized in the name of Jesus it means they have repented; they understood the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the ministry of Jesus Christ. So they are baptized into Jesus Christ. We should believe in Jesus Christ. Now the ones in the Ephesus were baptized into John's baptism. So therefore they are not equivalent. So therefore we cannot set these set of patterns.

Miracles

Acts 19:11-12 (ESV) And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.

So this is extraordinary what God was doing then we have got this bunch of exorcist who said, Paul is doing so well. He just snaps his finger the evil spirits go away so they tried the same trick.

Acts 19:13-16 (ESV) Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." 14 Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. 15 But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" 16 And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

Here we learn that you cannot use Jesus name like magic spell. It is like Dracula movies, the guy probably does not believe in Jesus but when Dracula comes he just takes out the cross and the Dracula is supposed to get scared of that. You cannot actually use Jesus name, you actually have to believe in him, which is not magical as it were.

True conversion will see a revision of values

Acts 19:17-20 (ESV) And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. 18 Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. 19 And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned

them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20 So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

So conversion will see a revision of values. So here you are taking their idols and smashing them and getting rid of them and even though the idols cost a lot of money. Same thing today, a lot of people who become Christians and come to church and they have very valuable idols, some of these idols are worth thousands of dollars. But when you actually become a Christian you have a reversal of values. It is no longer of very much value and they change. So if you actually are converted the idols have no power over you, have no value over you and they will be given away. It won't be difficult to get rid of the idol.

Idolatry

There was a temple of Artemis which is very famous there. It talks about the pervasiveness of idols, the weakness and power of idols, the cost of getting rid of idols.

(Acts 19:24-26 ESV) For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. 25 These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. 26 And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods

This is very threatening so this is the man who makes idols. It was a whole economy based on making idols and idols are expensive, they are inlaid with gold and silver and the market price is high. If the people start turning away from idols and towards Jesus Christ the economy will dive right down. So he gets really upset and the point is now, wherever Paul went the first thing he confronted were always the idolatry. Idolatry is fund in center in their society.

(Acts 17:29 ESV) Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man

So it was always front and center encountering idols and they are lots of idols, their entire system is filled with idols. If you go back 50 years our own country people worshipped idols as well. If you think the gods are not relevant anymore. You could say I believe in God and as you are in church and you are thinking

- But if only I have that contract from DHL then I would be safe and truly secure and happy
- But if only I have that promotion to partner then I would be safe and truly secure and happy
- But if only I marry that beautiful woman then I would be satisfied and happy

We can be in church and still have idols. Robert Bellah is a social anthropologist. He talks about Western society. In Western society they tell you

No one has a right to tell us who god is, no one has a right to tell us what to believe. We have the right to shape our own spirituality or faith and worship a god we prefer

We come to a Western influenced society where we each have to find our own gods. Just like I have seen a lot of Christians going from church to church find the kind of God and the kind of church that they like that fits your needs. They are not really looking for the true God, they are actually looking for the kind of church that will actually suit your needs. In a sense we are looking for idols. Anything more important than God for your identity, hope, meaning or happiness is an idol

Now idols are prime mover of your emotions and your behaviour and if you analyse your own life what makes you happy, what makes you sad and what drives you every day when you wake up in the morning that is your idol and if you are really honest every one of us has idols, even good things can be defied. Idols today are more subtle. Idols are

- Children doing well
- Parents approval
- Looks especially in young people
- Moral record
- Competence and skill

These idols are also very powerful and also very weak. When they are threatened

Acts 19:27-29 (ESV) *And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.” 28 When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” 29 So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel.*

Idols are very subtle in our society as well but when you threaten the idol all hells breaks loose. All idols are very powerful but the problem is idols are both powerful and is actually a paradoxical idea which Tim Keller points out. How are they powerful? David Bowie struggled with this.

“I had enormous self-image problems and very low self-esteem, which I hid behind obsessive writing and performing. ... I was driven to get through life very quickly,” “I really felt so utterly inadequate. I thought the work” — songwriting, recording, performing — “was the only thing of value.”

So he becomes very famous simply because he thinks he is an under achiever and the more he feels that he is under achieving he is working harder and harder and this idol is driving him all the way to the end.

Madonna is a woman who has been in showbiz for 40 years, arguably one of the most successful entertainers in history and this is what she writes in an interview,

I have so many [regrets] ...and I have none. I wish I hadn't done a lot of things, but, on the other hand, if I hadn't I wouldn't be here. But, then again, nobody works the way I work. I have an iron will. And all of my will has always been to conquer some horrible feeling of inadequacy. I'm always struggling with that fear. I push past one spell of it and discover myself as a special human being and then I get to another stage and think I'm mediocre and uninteresting. And I find a way to get myself out of that. Again and again. My drive in life is from this horrible fear of being mediocre. And that's always pushing me, pushing me. Because even though I've become Somebody. I still have to prove that Somebody. My struggle has never ended and it probably never will.

So here you actually have someone basically who is totally captivated by an idol. For her the idol is fame. So it is totally powerful and yet totally weak because it cannot fulfill her. Here we can see tinges of unhappiness in the way she describes herself. Kristen Bell a beautiful actress also says,

I struggled a lot with anxiety and depression," Bell revealed in a recent interview. "I shatter a little bit when I think people don't like me. That's part of why I lead with kindness and I compensate by being very bubbly all the time because it really hurts my feelings when I know I'm not liked."

So this is a very sad existence. If you are a film star and you got to be liked by everybody, 5000 people like you and one fellow tweet no good then you collapse. Then you are basically totally controlled by the idol which is powerful.

Admiral Boorda, the Chief of Naval Operations recently killed himself at the pinnacle of his career because he told a lie. He put two extra medals which he didn't win and they found out that he told a lie and he has so much honour that he dishonoured the naval academy that he actually killed himself. For him telling a truth was a very important thing. Again his idol is honour and glory.

Benjamin Nugent talked about this modern idea of monomania. He writes

When good writing was my only goal, I made the quality of my work the measure of my worth. For this reason, I wasn't able to read my own writing well. I couldn't tell whether something I had just written was good or bad, because I needed it to be good in order to feel sane. I lost the ability to cheerfully interrogate how much I liked what I had written, to see what was actually on the page rather than what I wanted to see or what I feared to see

Have you ever felt that when you look at a piece of work and because you are trying to live up to a standard and because you have to have that standard you either fear to look at it or you don't want to look at it and when you look at it, it is never good enough. So you are totally focused. So actually the idols are all powerful because it traps you, it brings you in, but it does not satisfy you in the end because you are always obsessed. That is the problem with the idol and then he solves this by saying

I purged myself of monomania — slowly, and somewhat unwittingly. I fell in love, an overpowering diversion, and began to spend more time at my girlfriend's place, where she

had Wi-Fi, a flat-screen TV and a DVD player. I joined a cover band that held live karaoke parties. One morning, after I diversified my mania, my writing no longer stank of decay. Eventually, it sat up and took food.

If he wasn't so focused on just one thing he diversified his mania. So instead of having one idol he has a few and that is how he settles it. A lot of famous people have that. Michael Phelps was told by his trainer

'Michael, you have all the money that anybody your age could ever want or need; you have a profound influence in the world; you have free time - and you're the most miserable person I know.'" Bill Bowman

He is basically the greatest Olympian who has ever lived. The desire for success drives him and still brings no joy because he is totally focused on swimming. All his life he only swims, so now he diversifies his idols. He has got two new idols, his son and his wife. He is happier now because he has got a son and he has got his wife but you be careful they are idolatry that way. Idols are empty yet totally powerful and control you and yet they give you nothing in return

Some of us can't retire because the moment you retire it becomes nobody. Our idol is our career. So a lot of professions are like that.

Families can become idols as well. I remember a friend of mine, Lewis in second year medicine he came from Hong Kong, struggling in exams because his father wanted him to be a doctor and all he lived for is parental approval. If you do that it becomes a stifling idol that does not let you go. So the most powerful idols are actually good things.

- Parents nurture their children but they don't nurture their own relationship with God.
- Parents seek the approval of the children but they don't seek the approval of their Lord. The children becomes their idol.
- Single people seeking spouse, more interested in seeking a spouse in the church then seeking God.

Good things, nothing wrong with having a spouse, but seeking of spouse is secondary to seeking God then that is the right thing. So it is actually good thing but being disordered that is the whole idea of idolatry. Families can be idolatry.

Romantic idols, if only I got married to the person that really got my juices going. The problem is you will crush him under your expectations and he will crush you with his imperfections. Nobody even a good person can be that kind of idol.

There are so many idols in the world; at least the Greeks were smart enough to put a name to the idols.

- Hera – goddess of marriage, mothers family.
- Demeter – goddess of agriculture.
- Aphrodite – goddess of love and beauty.

- Apollos – god of sun and medicine.
- Artemis – goddess of the hunt and young women.
- Hermes – god of thieves and merchants.

So they have a name actually for all the idols that we actually have. We don't use the same names but we actually have the same idols. Nike is a name of the goddess of victory that is why Nike shoes were named after that.

So when Paul goes into any city the people oppose him. The reason why they oppose him, they are serving all these idols. They are doing all these things. Spurgeon was a very famous English preacher, I am doing 50 things to please God and here you are, you come and tell me just believe in Jesus Christ that is all, they cannot believe it, so they get very upset with him.

Religious people trouble is that they find Jesus useful. Christians are the once who find Jesus beautiful. So idolatry is something that you have to do in order to gain whilst the gospel is completely different. It is what Christ has already done for you and you fall back and you just admire and find God beautiful as it were.

There is also idolatry in thanksgiving and prayer. James says

James 4:3-5 (ESV) **You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. 4 You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"?**

Sometimes we pray, go to prayer meeting but you just pray and spend it on your passions. So we are actually using God to fulfill our idolatry. That is why some of our prayers don't get answered because we are praying to an idol, because we want God to fulfill your idolatrous needs.

To smash the idol is to do so at a cost.

Acts 19:30-31 (ESV) **But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. 31 And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater.**

Idols also destroy community. Idolatry changes our hearts, it actually dehumanizes us and it affects our families, our communities and our church. Idolatry shapes our values and the way we look at people in church, in our own families.

If you have an idol as money, everybody you see in your family or your friends or your church, creditors, debtors, customers or partners. This is how you will look at people. Or you will look at them as rich, poor or middle class, which one can help me. How you look at people depend on what your idols are. If you come have a Gamma meal, so many people complaining, now what kind of idols do you have? If you have the wrong idol, you will say

- Is it worth the money?
- Who is paying?
- Who is not paying?
- What is return on investment?

I see all of you ask these questions, why, because you got the wrong idol. You are just worshipping the money; to you the meal is all about the money. Who gives dam about the money, we are looking at the spiritual benefit, and you wouldn't be looking at it in that way. So basically what you feel when you think is driven by your idols. If sex is important to you every person you will see either be beautiful or ugly, because that is how you are orientated. If you worship power then you will look at somebody as a competitor, you look at someone as collaborator and then you look at somebody detractor. So idols dehumanize the heart and cause us to act inhumanely towards others.

You can see in many parts of the world where they have got mass murders. The only way they act like that because they have an idol. The idols for the Nazis were the Aryan race, the purity of the Aryan race and everybody else is at the bottom and the scum of the earth are the Jews. The Japanese when they came into China and also Malaysia and started killing a lot of Chinese because they were taught by the superiors that the Chinese were not human beings, they were higher order of apes that's allowed them to dehumanize and so therefore they killed, in Singapore they killed 20 to 30,000. So idolatry is dangerous because it makes us choose.

Mark Driscoll wrote,

If we idolize our gender, we must demonize the other gender. If we idolize our nation, we must demonize other nations. If we idolize our political party, we must demonize other political parties. If we idolize our socioeconomic class, we must demonize other classes. If we idolize our family, we must demonize other families. If we idolize our theological system, we must demonize other theological systems. If we idolize our church, we must demonize other churches. This explains the great polarities and acrimonies that plague every society. If something other than God's loving grace is the source of our identity and value, we must invariably defend our idol by treating everyone and everything who may call our idol into question as an enemy to be demonized so that we can feel superior to other people and safe with our idol.

So idolatry affects us when you look at another race in this country especially. We live in a multiracial country and often some of the leaders are trying to polarize us, making us demonize each other and increasing these splits and they idolize their race. We too also idolize our race; we think other races are very lazy in our eyes, our eyes very hardworking, very prosperous. That is idolatry too. We idolize our race and we are superior to other people it makes us feel good. So that is the sin of idolatry.

It is a short journey into something that is very-very real to all of us. All of us have idols and life is a process of breaking free from idols. The first thing you need to do is identify your idol.

When your idol gives you something which brings you closer to the idol you are happy. When your idol is threatened it makes you sad. So first thing you have to think is that what makes you happy and what makes you sad and that is where your idol is. If your idol is what makes you happy is someone coming to know the Lord or having a fantastic prayer time with the Lord and worship and all that then you are saved but if it is anything else then you have got a problem.

A lot of people in churches follow God if He gives them the things that they need. We don't follow God for who He is and so therefore journey in life is learning to have the one true God and that one God we can actually love, get excited about and learn to do that.