

Gamma

Acts 19

Study 17 Mission to Ephesus

1. vv.1-7. Recall what we know about Apollos (18:24-28). How does that account for the “problem” of these men? Do you think these men were Christians? Look at Paul’s questions and try to discern what elements were missing and what elements must be present before a person can truly said to be a Christian?

The problem. Apollos, who had ministered in Ephesus, originally preached Jesus, but only “*knew only the baptism of John*” (v.25). In other words, John the Baptist’s disciples, who believed Jesus was the Messiah, had also spread the word about the Christ. But, of course, the disciples of John had not been instructed thoroughly in the Scriptures by the risen Christ as had the apostles, including Paul. Thus Luke said that Apollos in some ways “*taught about Jesus accurately*” (v.25), but needed more “*adequate*” knowledge and instruction in the “*way of God*” (v.26). From our vantage point, it isn’t possible to be sure what these rudimentary Jesus followers knew and did not. But this partial or faulty knowledge is the reason for the inadequate experience of the twelve men here, who only knew John’s baptism and who had not received the Holy Spirit (19:2-3).

There have been some who have insisted that these twelve men were real Christians (i.e. born again) but they had not received the Holy Spirit’s power with the accompanying sign of speaking in tongues. Many Pentecostal churches have pointed to this as a norm for Christians, who first are born again and later receive the Holy Spirit. But that is a very dubious reading of the passage. These men evidently called themselves “*disciples*” (v.1) of Christ, but most commentators, including many charismatic ones such as Michael Green, acknowledge that these are clearly not Christians. How do we know that?

Are they Christians? First, Paul asks if they have evidence of the Holy Spirit in their lives. They respond that they didn’t even know there was a Holy Spirit. (v.2) That shows that these men did not hear the gospel

from anyone who went out from Christ's church — no one would preach the gospel without talking about the spiritual new birth at least. This ignorance of the Holy Spirit — both intellectual and personal — is not characteristic of a born again person who needs spiritual power. These men were devoid of the Holy Spirit at all. Second, we notice that, when they said that they did not receive the Holy Spirit, Luke says, "*so Paul asked, 'then what baptism...'*" (v.3). This shows that the fact that they did not receive the Holy Spirit was abnormal. Paul says, "if this is the case, how did you receive Christ at the beginning?" He does not proceed and say, "oh, well, then you need to have me lay hands on you so you can receive power." Rather, their lack of spiritual experience makes him re-examine their foundations. Clearly, this is not a "norm" for anyone.

What are the elements? Paul asks, "*what baptism did you receive*"? (v.3), and discover that it was "*John's*". Paul responds that John's baptism was, in essence, only "half a gospel" — the "bad news" of repentance. "*John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, [but] he told the people to believe in the one coming... in Jesus.*" (v.4). In other words, he is saying — "you repented, but you did not yet believe. John told you that you did need to eventually believe, and now I will tell you about the one in whom you must now trust". In a sense, Paul is using the term "baptism" to mean "message". John's message was not the full gospel. He showed people that they could not save themselves by their good works, that they had to repent. That *is* the first half of the gospel, a true and right step away from moralism and human religion. He also indicated that there was a second half to the gospel — belief in the *one coming after him*. Now Paul explains the way of Christ to them. We don't know what they didn't understand — it could have been that they did not understand the meaning of Christ's death and resurrection on our behalf. But when after "*hearing this*" they were baptized *into the name of Jesus* (v.5). That phrase "into the name" means that they came to know who Jesus was. This time, God showed everyone that they had been born again with a visible manifestation of power with speaking in tongues. We have seen that at other important times (but not always) God sends these little imitations of the day of Pentecost (Acts 8, 10, and here) as a way to show his approval and presence.

The elements are these then: a) there must be repentance, b) there must be faith in Jesus, c) there must be the new spiritual birth and presence

of the Holy Spirit. That is what makes a Christian a Christian.

2. Take some time to reflect on how Paul's mission methods (especially in Acts 17-19) instruct the modern church? What does he do that we neglect or omit?

a) First, he is more flexible than most ministries or churches. He has a very broad array of different approaches, and he tried them all. Generally, churches and ministries settle on one approach. Now that is good, in that most of us are not as multi-gifted as Paul, and we cannot do them all. We should concentrate on what we can do with our skill-set. But on the other hand, most ministries and churches tend to see their method as the only one, the best one. We are so uncreative that we look at the city through unconscious "screens" and mental filters, so we see only the opportunities for our pet methods, or we see only the people who can be reached with our methods. We need to be far more creative and multi-dimensional. In our city, we should find people who can do them all

b) Second, he spent far more time sharing his faith in secular spaces than "sacred" ones. Though he went to synagogues, he spent far more time in private homes, market places, and public buildings. If we are to follow Paul, we will not do most of our ministry "at church" but out in the workplace, the marketplace, the home, lecture halls, clubs, and so on. We see him finding opportunities to speak, dialogue, and make presentations of the gospel in every setting possible.

c) Third, his presentations were very well reasoned, intelligent. He was completely unafraid of questions and debate and intellectual engagement. The two Greek verbs continually used in both chapter 18 and 19 are *dialegomai* ("to reason" or "to argue") and *peitho* ("to persuade"). As we have seen throughout the book of Acts, the gospel is not simply proclaimed, but reasons for belief — both personal and intellectual — are always given as well.

"Because [Paul] believed the gospel to be true, he was not afraid to engage the minds of his hearers. He did not simply proclaim his message in a 'take it or leave it' fashion; instead he marshalled arguments to support and demonstrate

his case... What he renounced in Corinth (See 1 Cor 1 and 2) was the wisdom [the premises of the world], not the wisdom of God, and the rhetoric of the Greeks, not the use of arguments... We must never set... trust in the Holy Spirit over against... arguments... as alternatives. No, the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and he brings people to faith in Jesus not in spite of the evidence, but because of the evidence, when he opens their minds to attend to it.”

– Stott, p.312-313

d) Fourth, we see Paul identifying with the people of the city and got to understand their life and ways. He spent a year and a half at Corinth (18:11 - but v.18 indicates he spent time after that — perhaps two years all told.) Then he went to Ephesus where he stayed three months at his synagogue preaching-evangelism and then two years at his lecture hall dialogue- evangelism. (19:8,10). We know from 20:34 that Paul continued his tent-making in Ephesus. In other words, he really became part of those communities, living and working among the people and getting to know them from the “inside”, not just as a traveling speaker who was only, essentially, a tourist.

To learn from Paul’s “tentmaking” we need to extend the application and talk about the importance of community involvement. At one point in the Corinthian ministry, Paul did “full time evangelism”, but both at Corinth and Ephesus he participated in the economic and social life of the city as a co-citizen. It is important that some Christians become very involved in the social and economic life of the city, doing significant labor for safe neighborhoods, economic development, etc. Christians need to be fully engaged in the civic life of the city.

e) Fifth, we see Paul made himself accessible to the unbelievers. He allowed people to come back at him, to get to know him. Paul essentially allowed the non-believing listener to be co-partners in setting the agenda for each presentation of the gospel. There is an ancient textual footnote to 19:9 that tells us Paul lectured from 11:00 am to 4:00 pm everyday. (F. F. Bruce proposes that classes probably took place in the hall during the morning, at the same time Paul did his tent-making. Then he went to the lecture hall and dialogued all afternoon — 5 hours a day! See Bruce, pp.388-389). By putting himself in a public place, day after day, he showed himself ready to answer any questions. He was not defensive or “pontifical”, but accessible and engaging.

“When we contrast much contemporary evangelism with Paul’s, its

shallowness is immediately shown up. Our evangelism tends to be too ecclesiastical (inviting people to church) whereas Paul also took the gospel out into the secular world; too emotional (appeals for decision without an adequate basis of understanding), whereas Paul taught, reasoned and tried to persuade; and too superficial (making brief encounters and expecting quick results), whereas Paul stayed in Corinth and Ephesus for five years, faithfully sowing gospel seed and in due time reaping a harvest.”

– Stott, p.314

Follow-up question: Make a list of way that our church or ministry could do all of the five methods that we have seen Paul use.

a) Preaching “synagogue” evangelism.

Sunday preacher preaches to both Christians and non-routinely. Christians bring a friends to church. Response classes for seekers at church.

b) Contact “market square” evangelism.

“Booths” and evangelism at public events: parades, fairs, expos. Street/park evangelism: outdoor concert and speaker and follow-up. Tracts and literature handouts.

c) Friendship “household” evangelism.

Home small group fellowship meetings with non-believers present
Home discussion group series targeted just for non-believers
Home Outreach event (BPO HOB’s; many variations possible on an

evangelistic dessert or reception for friends) Personal friendship evangelism with relatives, associates, over coffee or

meald) Dialogue “lecture hall” evangelism.

Evangelistic lecture, dialogue at colleges and grad schools or artistic/cultural institutions (Christian perspective on subject of broad interest)

Evangelistic breakfasts, luncheons in business centers, clubs (Talk and dialogue on subject of broad interest to business men and women)

“Open Forum”: artistic presentation and evangelistic talk and dialogue in some public concert space or theater

e) Apologetic “Mars Hill” evangelism.

Regular column in major newspaper or respected periodical TV/radio venues that reach non-Christians (not media aimed at

Christians)Addressing major associations of academics or media elite or other

opinion-makersBooks aimed at unbelievers that command broad respect (e.g.”Mere

Christianity”) or respect from specific “elite” audiences (e.g.

philosophical works)Major movie that establishes some parts of Christian truth/message

How can your Gamma group adopt a particular method or event ?

4. vv.11-20. What can we learn: a) about the place of miracles in ministry from vv.11-12, b) about the power of Jesus’ name from vv.13-16, c) about the marks of real conversion from vv.17-20?

a) We should see a balance here in Luke’s description of miracles. First, Luke calls them “*extraordinary*” (v.11). That is not just a gushing remark, as to say “wonderful, tremendous”. The Greek word *tychousas* literally means “singular” or “unusual”. That means that these were very unusual signs, sent by God to support the Ephesian ministry. There is no indication that they happened everywhere, nor is there indication that Paul and his team expected them to. We are not to assume miracles as typical and normal in ministry. Even the great St.Paul did not consider them normative in his ministry, and he was an apostle-- how should we then do so? But second, on the other hand, this account should make us wary of being skeptical and cynical about the power of God to heal. We should pray for God’s power to heal people (as we are told in James 5:16).

b) We should see here that Jesus’ name is not magic. The story is actually very humorous. Seven Jewish exorcists had heard about the “power of Jesus name”, and decided to “try it out”. They clearly don’t understand the gospel for themselves. They say, “I command you in the name of Jesus, who Paul preaches” (v.13) because they themselves do not preach or present Jesus. The demon says, in effect: “I know

Jesus and Paul — but who the heck do you guys think you are?” and jumps them! The point is there is nothing mechanically or automatically powerful about the sound “Jesus” made when the breath passes through the voicebox in a particular way. The efficacy of Jesus “name” lies only in the understanding of what Jesus came to do — its the gospel of Jesus which is powerful. When we use the gospel of Jesus on our lives, it cleanses and transforms and heals. But therefore Jesus’ name has no second-hand power — it only works first hand, when appropriated through personal understanding and commitment.

We may want to look at ourselves here. Don’t be too sure that we don’t do what the Seven sons of Sceva did. When we invoke his name and ask for his help and power while we are a) not enjoying him, and b) not obeying him--is magic.

c) We learn in vv.17-20 that true conversion leads to a concrete change in lifestyle. These new converts had been involved in occult practices and “*evil deeds*”. They made open and visible changes in their lives. Those who renounced sorcery and burned their magic books did so at great financial loss. (Had they sold their manuscripts to keep their value, the books would have led others to stumble and be entangled.) Sometimes, becoming a Christian will mean walking away from lucrative business practices.