

## The Acts of the Apostles

Sermon Number: 28

Acts 18:18 – 19:41

April 15, 2012

### Freed from Idolatry

In our previous lesson we followed the Apostle Paul from Athens to Corinth. Corinth was as corrupt and sinful a city as could be found anywhere.

But Paul was sent to such a place because the Lord told him:

<sup>9</sup>And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, "Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, <sup>10</sup>for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people." Acts 18:9-10

Preachers need to understand that any positive response to the preaching of the Gospel is entirely the prerogative of our sovereign Lord Jesus Christ.

Matthew 11:25-30

<sup>25</sup>At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; <sup>26</sup>yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. <sup>27</sup>All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. <sup>28</sup>Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup>For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

The Gospel is an invitation; but an invitation to do what?

The Gospel is an invitation to acknowledge that you have a heavy burden of sin; and that you labor in unrest of your soul with the guilt of sin.

Then when you hear the Gospel and the Holy Spirit opens your sin-darkened mind to see your need for a Savior, AND if the Son of God reveals Himself to you as the One in whom you may rest your soul; **then** you will Come to Christ and be saved!

The business of a faithful preacher of the Gospel is to be sure that it is the Gospel that is preached; that Christ died for sinners; to pray that the Lord will be pleased to reveal Himself; and trust the results to the Holy Spirit.

Far too many Baptist churches have about two-thirds of their members who made a “decision” when the preacher told them it was in the power of their “free will” to allow God to save them and then some time later they made another decision; they decided that they still loved their sin more than they love Jesus Christ; they decided that meeting with the church was not all that important. They will tell you they are saved but they are just more fuel for the fires of hell.

Jim, are you making meeting with the church matter of necessity; just like some legalistic churches that teach that you must be baptized “in order to be saved”?

No, what I am saying is that a redeemed, justified, adopted, saved person wants to stop sinning on purpose and they will want to meet with the church.

The Lord must have all the credit for what I am about to say, else it would be foolish boasting and pharisaic pride, but I can truthfully say that ever since the Lord saved me I have never asked myself the question, “Am I going to meet with the church?” I don’t have to decide on Sunday and Wednesday if I can’t find anything else that is more important to me that I might as well go to church.

Let’s pick up where we left Paul in the city of Corinth.

We will start at Acts 18:18 and if the Lord wills work through the end of Acts chapter 19.

Paul was a “troublemaker.” Paul did not intend to cause trouble, but everywhere he went and preached the Gospel conflicts erupted! Certain Jews followed Paul to wherever he went and stirred up the crowds saying that he preached contrary to the law. But Paul’s answer was that what he was preaching was what the law and the prophets were always about.

God promised in the Holy Scriptures to send Messiah to suffer and die in the place of guilty sinners and that Jesus of Nazareth is Messiah {Christ}.

Paul had not attended the school of evangelism that many of today’s most popular preachers were graduated from. Paul told everyone that they were guilty sinners; that Jesus died for sinners; that Jesus of Nazareth is the fulfillment of the Scriptures; that God will either save you or send you to hell; and that the choice is God’s choice and not yours to make! If you choose to believe in Jesus Christ it is because God the Father chose you first.

So Paul was confrontational, not that he didn't love people, but he loved them so much that he told them the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

We saw in the first part of chapter 18 that Paul met two believers in Corinth, named Pricilla and Aquila, who were tentmakers; the same profession as Paul. Paul's method of evangelism was direct; he went to the synagogues where the Jews were and preached Jesus Christ from the Scriptures.

Pricilla and Aquila were more subtle in their evangelism as they lived and worked quietly making tents and cloth from goat skins. They lived with the people and were able to show them by their manner of living that they were believers. When the occasion arose they were able to correct the theology of a man named Apollos.

### **It is time to leave Corinth**

### **Acts 18:18**

<sup>18</sup> 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.

After this.... Paul had been in Corinth for 18 months and the community of believers had grown. The beginnings of the "many people in the city who belong to the Lord" have formed a church. They had come out of pagan wickedness and were growing in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul had "brothers" [the word includes women] in Corinth and the letters he wrote to the Corinthian Church show how much he loved these people.

So Paul leaves Corinth knowing that the Holy Spirit would continue to guide them into the way of life in Christ. He left Corinth and set sail for Syria and took with him Pricilla and Aquila.

### **Paul's Vow**

### **Acts 18:18**

Acts 18:18

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. At Cenchreae he had cut his hair, for he was under a vow.

Paul and his friends leave the seaport town of Cenchreae and head to Ephesus.

Before Paul left Cenchreae he had his head shaved because of a vow he had taken.

We are not told what the vow involved but we can surmise that Paul was thankful to God for the wonderful things that happened in Corinth.

Please note that while Paul was a champion for the Gospel and being free from the ceremonial law he still observed some Jewish customs.

### **Paul at Ephesus**

### **Acts 18:19**

<sup>19</sup> And they came to Ephesus, and he left them there, but he himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

When Paul and Pricilla and Aquila came to Ephesus Pricilla and Aquila blended in with the people but Paul went into the synagogue to preach Christ from the Scriptures; that is how Paul “reasoned with the Jews.”

**Ephesus** was the most important, the wealthiest, and the most populous city in the entire Roman Empire. The population was estimated to be about a half million. Ephesus was the cultural center with facilities for drama, music, and athletic events.

But religion was the city’s main business with the large temple to the goddess Artemis; her Greek name; she is Diana in Latin. Her image was of a woman with many breasts to praise her for fertility and nourishment.

The temple of Diana is one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The temple was four times larger than the Parthenon in Athens. One of its statues of the goddess was said to have fallen from heaven. The worship of Diana {Artemis} involved temple prostitutes. An interesting note is that the temple also served as the financial center and bank.

### **Paul says I will return**

### **Acts 18:20-23**

<sup>20</sup> When they asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined. <sup>21</sup> But on taking leave of them he said, "I will return to you if God wills," and he set sail from Ephesus.

**“If God wills....”**

Paul did not stay very long in Ephesus on this initial visit. The Jews at Ephesus were ready to listen to Paul and asked him to stay. But Paul wanted to be in Jerusalem, probably for Passover, and he had to leave before the winter season and the bad weather

<sup>22</sup> When he had landed at Caesarea, he went up and greeted the church, and then went down to Antioch. <sup>23</sup> After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

Paul lands at Caesarea and then returns to his home base in Antioch. After some time in Antioch Paul visits churches in the region of Galatia and Phrygia.

### **Priscilla and Aquila**

### **Acts 18:24-28**

<sup>24</sup> Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. <sup>25</sup> He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. <sup>26</sup> He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

<sup>27</sup> And 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, <sup>28</sup> for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

Priscilla and Aquila, Paul's co-workers in Corinth, stayed behind in Ephesus and involved themselves in the synagogue, continuing to preach the Gospel to the Jews.

A man named Apollos from Alexandria in Egypt was a student of the Scriptures. He was a believer that Jesus was the Christ but he only knew about the baptism of John. There was something missing in his theology.

Apollos apparently did not know about the Jerusalem Council that had clarified the matter of Gentiles not having to be circumcised; that the Jews must be saved the same way that Gentiles are saved; and that by grace through faith alone.

When Pricilla and Aquila heard Apollos teach they quietly took him and explained to him the Gospel more fully. Now Apollos was freed from any remaining legalism and he could preach the Gospel of amazing grace.

## **Have you been baptized?**

## **Acts 19:1-7**

<sup>1</sup> And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. <sup>2</sup> 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." <sup>3</sup> And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." <sup>4</sup> 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." <sup>5</sup> On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. <sup>7</sup> There were about twelve men in all.

When Paul arrived in Ephesus he found some disciples of John the Baptist, who like Apollos, had some gaps in their theology and understanding of what it means to believe that Jesus is Messiah and that He has come and finished the work of dying for sinners.

There were about twelve men who believed in Messiah but something was missing. They had obeyed John's call for repentance and were trying to live by John's teachings; but they had not received the Holy Spirit.

Until the Holy Spirit regenerates a person, no matter how religious they may be, they are not saved. "You must be born again!"

There are those who take a passage like this and prove too much.

These are times of transition from the OT to the NT and much of what takes place in the Book of Acts is not to be taken as normative for all future generations. It is true that these men spoke in tongues and prophesied but that does not prove that every person who is ever saved must have such an experience. You must study the epistles that were written to give the church instruction on matters such tongues, e.g. First Corinthians.

## **Consistent Evangelism**

## **Acts 19:8-10**

<sup>8</sup> And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. <sup>9</sup> But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. <sup>10</sup> This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

Paul continues to preach in the synagogue about Jesus and the Kingdom of God and many Jews were coming to faith in Jesus as Messiah. When some became stubborn and continued in unbelief Paul moved with his disciples to the Hall of Tyrannus where he continued for about two more years and great numbers heard the Word of the Lord.

## **Encountering the Occult**

## **Acts 19:11-12**

<sup>11</sup> And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, <sup>12</sup> 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.

As already mentioned, Ephesus was the center of religion; most of it pagan superstition with many dabblers in the occult and magic. The city was well known for selling lucky charms and magic spells. There were magic parchments that contained incantations of secret names and words that guaranteed save travel, fertility, and success in business and love.

These were known as the “Ephesian Letters.”

Please note that there is a vast market in the year 2012 for similar items.

This is an interesting passage because it seems that God actually used items of clothing that has touched Paul’s skin to drive out sickness and evil spirits.

There is not much help in the commentaries; one of my favorite commentaries, The Pulpit Commentary, has nothing on these two verses.

Barnes Notes:

Acts 19:11

[**Special miracles**] Miracles that were remarkable; that were not common, or that were very unusual....

Acts 19:12

(2) We are not to suppose that there was any efficacy in the aprons thus brought, or in the mere fact that they had touched the body of Paul, anymore than there was in the hem of the Saviour's garment which the woman touched, or in the clay which he made use of to open the eyes of the blind man, John 8:6.

(3) In this instance, the fact that the miracles were performed in this manner by garments which had touched his body, was a mere sign, or an evidence to the persons concerned, that it was done by the instrumentality of Paul, as the fact that the Saviour put his fingers into the ears of a deaf man, and spit and touched his tongue (Mark 7:33), was an evidence to those who saw it that the power of healing came from him. The bearing of these aprons to the sick was, therefore, merely evidence to all concerned that miraculous power was given to Paul.

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**Who are you?**

**Acts 19:13-16**

<sup>13</sup> 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." <sup>14</sup> Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. <sup>15</sup> But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" <sup>16</sup> 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.

In my Bible Study of Humor in the Bible, this is one of my favorite scenes.

The "Seven sons of Sceva" were Jewish exorcists who had seen what Paul was doing and thought to add Jesus to their lists of incantations and magic.

When they called on Jesus, whom Paul proclaims, to cast out the demon, the evil spirit responds with, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?"

Then the demon jumped on the seven sons of Sceva and nearly beat them to death so that they ran out of the house naked. FUNNY!



## **What to do with all that religious junk?**

**Acts 19:17-22**

<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

<sup>21</sup> Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." <sup>22</sup> And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

When something as funny as what happened to the seven sons of Sceva it gets spread around fast. While it was funny the impact was very serious. Both Jews and Greeks began to fear {respect} the name of Jesus. Christians realized that their use of magic spells was sinful and they openly repented and confessed that it was sinful.

What they did was to bring all of this religious junk and the "Ephesian Letters" and burned them in a public bonfire.

The value of this religious junk was 50,000 pieces of silver, which is 50,000 days' wages.

Paul expresses his desire to go to Jerusalem and then to Rome.

## **Pain in the Purse**

**Acts 19:23-41**

What happens when a person who is involved in a sinful business gets saved?

Several trades were involved in the religious business in Ephesus.

Silversmiths made their living producing silver replicas of the goddess Diana; others made up the magic lists and all of the paraphernalia of idolatry.

A man named Demetrius led a public riot against Paul.

They praised the Great Diana, but what really upset them was their loss of income from the religion business.

Paul wanted to speak to the crowd but was advised not to do it.

The “town clerk,” or the mayor, quieted the mob by warning them of trouble from the Roman authorities who would not tolerate such demonstrations. He urged them to make their complaints according to the Roman law.

Now let’s read the narrative and notice these things.

<sup>23</sup> About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. <sup>24</sup> For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. <sup>25</sup> These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, “Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> 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.”

<sup>28</sup> When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. <sup>31</sup> And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater. <sup>32</sup> Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. <sup>33</sup> Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd. <sup>34</sup> But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

<sup>35</sup> And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, “Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky? <sup>36</sup> Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. <sup>37</sup> For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. <sup>38</sup> If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. <sup>39</sup> But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. <sup>40</sup> For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion.” <sup>41</sup> And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.

It doesn't take much discernment to distinguish between religious superstition and the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

There are a number of things that accompany salvation. You should be generous; you should be faithful to meet with the church; you should be a good husband, wife, child, or employee; all important but only the result of being saved; not the cause of being saved.

Can you, by the grace of God, forsake all trust in religious charms, vain repetitions, ceremonies, and things you **do** and put your entire trust in what Jesus has **done**?