

## EXPOSITION OF ACTS

### Message #43

### Acts 19:1-20

Last weekend when Kevin Costner walked up on the platform to speak at the funeral of Whitney Houston, his first words were, “this feels right.” That ideology that we do what feels right is the real problem of life. Most people govern their lives by a philosophy that says I do what feels right. That certainly is the real problem of religion. Most people who go to churches where they are not being taught the truth do so because “it feels right.” The Mormons, for example, are caught up in a false religious cult that makes a mockery of Jesus Christ and they will tell you they have a burning in their bosom that feels right. Truth is most people who believe religious things do so because “it feels right.” That does not mean it is right, but it feels right.

The Apostle Paul was the apostle God singled out to take the true Gospel of His grace to the entire Gentile world. Everywhere he went he ran into religious people who believed things that to them felt right, but they were not right, they were dangerously wrong. Never is that point more evident that when on his third missionary journey, he came to the great commercial city of Ephesus.

### **WHEN PAUL WENT TO EPHESUS HE PROCLAIMED THE TRUTH OF THE WORD OF GOD TO A VERY CONFUSED RELIGIOUS WORLD.**

We may recall that Paul had a brief stop in Ephesus on his way to his home church in Syria (18:19). The people in Ephesus wanted him to stay, but the timing was not right so he left Priscilla and Aquila there and moved on. He is now on his third missionary journey and he ended up back in Ephesus.

The city of Ephesus was a city that featured the temple of Diana, which was an archeological wonder. It was 425 feet long and 220 feet wide. There were 127 white marble columns that each stood 60 feet high. It was a pagan temple and it became a tourist attraction and a headquarters for crooks and criminals and those given to immoral behavior. There was a church in Ephesus that existed in Paul’s day and we know that Jesus addressed this church in Revelation in the final days of the Apostle John.

Paul had told the Ephesians that if it were God’s will he would return (18:21). Well it was God’s will and he did return. When Paul got back to Ephesus, he did not find a city given to true worship; he found all kinds of religious people who were not right with God. They worshipped with feeling, but not in truth, so Paul opened up truth for these people. In this text, there are four groups of people to whom Paul presented truth:

### **GROUP #1 – Paul taught God’s truth to John the Baptist’s disciples. 19:1-7**

In these verses, the Apostle Paul arrived in Ephesus and has an interesting encounter with about twelve disciples of John the Baptist. There is no question that John had his own disciples (Matt. 14:12), so there were some of his disciples who apparently had left the Judean area and were now in Ephesus.

According to **verse 2**, Paul must have seen something in them that prompted him to ask them about their spiritual condition. Now these twelve had all been baptized in water, but Paul sensed something was missing in their spiritual lives. Paul could not see any real evidence that they were in communion with the Holy Spirit. So Paul asks them a question- “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” Now the Greek uses two verbs in the same tense which would indicate that Paul assumes that if they had actually believed in Jesus Christ, they would have received the Holy Spirit because the action would be simultaneous. The New American Standard translates his question properly.

Their answer in **verse 2** was we haven’t even heard of the Holy Spirit. Now Jesus had clearly taught that the Holy Spirit would be crucial for this age (John 7:37-39). So this fact that they had not heard of the Holy Spirit would indicate they did not know Jesus Christ. **These were religious people who had been baptized in water, but they did not have a real relationship with Jesus Christ.**

So in **verse 3** Paul follows up and says, “well into what were you baptized?” They said, “into John’s baptism.” **They were baptized but they were not saved.** Now John baptized a “baptism of repentance” in which Israel physically expressed that she was waiting for her King to come. These guys had missed the fact that the King had come. They probably left Jerusalem before Christ surfaced and moved to Ephesus. Here were very religious people trying to worship God and they had no relationship with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Paul says in **verse 4** that John baptized with water, but he told them that the purpose of that baptism was to introduce them to the One who would come after John, who is none other than Jesus Christ.

According to **verse 5**, when they heard that, they believed in Jesus Christ and were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and then in **verse 6**, Paul laid his hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit and they began speaking in a foreign language and were biblically prophesying in a foreign language. Ephesus was a city that featured many different languages and these men were able to speak truth in those foreign languages. Now **verse 5** is the only instance of rebaptism in the New Testament. Those who had been baptized into John’s baptism were not baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Notice it is a baptism into the name of the Lord Jesus; not in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

There are some differences between what happens to John’s disciples and believers today:

- 1) The believer today receives God’s Spirit the moment he believes on Jesus Christ.
- 2) No apostle lays their hands on any today to receive the Holy Spirit.
- 3) The apostolic ability to speak in a foreign language that you do not learn is no longer operative. This gift has ceased (I Cor. 13:8).

Think about this for a moment. You have John’s disciples who feel like they are right with God, but they do not have a true relationship with Jesus Christ. I believe this is a major issue today for many who go to church.

We have had many people come to this church who have told us that when they went into a church where there was a rock band that something did not feel right. How do you explain all of the people who go to those churches where it does feel right? One possible answer is, they do not have the Spirit of God, just like the disciples of John the Baptist or they are so insensitive to the Spirit of God that they no longer sense what is right.

**GROUP #2** – Paul taught God’s truth to the Jews in the synagogue. **19:8-9a**

Another group who was worshipping, but not according to truth, were Jews who went to the synagogue. These are religious people who are lost. For three months Paul went to the synagogue and preached God’s Word. In fact, the text says that Paul was reasoning and persuading them concerning “the kingdom of God.”

Undoubtedly, he was teaching them that the whole program of God hinged upon them believing in Jesus Christ. The O.T. Law was not going to take them into their Kingdom; they needed the righteousness of God found in Jesus Christ.

After a while, people got tired of Paul’s preaching and their hearts became hardened. In fact, they began to speak evil of Paul and his teaching. We may be certain that if we are accurately teaching the truth of the grace of God, we will run into hard hearts and those who will speak evil against us. They did it to Jesus, they did it to Paul and they certainly will do it to us.

**GROUP #3** – Paul taught God’s truth to the true believers. **19:9b-10**

Now I want you to carefully look at **verses 9-10**. Believers need to go to school to learn the Scriptures. **The church should be a place where God’s people can go to school to be educated in the Word of God.** Believers need to be taught by a teacher and they need to become students. Paul knew that these believers needed to be taught grace. Some of them had been believers for quite a few months and years. Apparently, there was a school building available called “the school of Tyrannus” so Paul held classes every day. He took the Christians there and taught there for two years every day. Now Paul actually taught in Ephesus for three straight years (Acts 20:31), but two of those years he taught at this school. It is possible that Tyrannus, who owned the school, had become a believer and let Paul use his facility, but the text does not say that.

There is an old text, which is not necessarily inspired, that says Paul taught from the 5<sup>th</sup> hour of the day, which would be 11:00 in the morning until the 10<sup>th</sup> hour of the day, which would be 4 P.M. If this is true then that would mean Paul taught 5 hours a day for 7 days or 35 hours per week. That would mean that in two years he would have taught the people some 3640 hours of biblical instruction.

To put that in some perspective, if a truly trained Grace Age minister went to a church and taught 3 hours a week, we are looking at a little over 1213 weeks or a little over 23 years of serious teaching. Do you see the importance of the Word of God? Do you see the importance of a minister carefully teaching the Word of God? This is what Paul did for several hours every day. He carefully taught God’s Word to one church- the church of Ephesus.

We know from our journey through Ephesians that he taught them the deep doctrines of God's grace. The result of his teaching ministry is that people went out and communicated what they learned to the point that all people in Asia heard the Word of God; both Jews and Gentiles.

**GROUP #4** – Paul taught God's truth and it affected the demonic world. **19:11-20**

God was performing special extraordinary miracles by the hands of the Apostle Paul. Notice these are extraordinary things, not ordinary things. I like what Dr. Kenneth Gangel said, "these were no common healings" (*Acts*, p. 323).

The word "miracle" is one that means God was doing some very special and very dynamic things through Paul. Anything that touched the body of the Apostle Paul miraculously healed the sick of diseases and of evil spirits (**19:11-12**). This was an apostolic sign and it is not a sign for today. By the way, the "handkerchiefs" or "aprons" would have been dirty. These were not new things that were marketed to hand to people who gave Paul money. Handkerchiefs were used to wipe sweat off one's face and neck and aprons were worn to protect the clothes from dirt and grime. Whenever Paul would discard something like this and someone would take it to someone sick or demon possessed, the person was healed.

Now there were some Jewish exorcists who went from place to place trying to cast out demons like Paul. They were leaders in religion not because they knew truth or could teach truth; they were there to make money, lots of money. They went from place to place promoting their false religion and they earned a good living doing it.

One such man was a Jewish chief priest whose name was Sceva and he had seven sons and they were going around from place to place casting out demons using the name of Jesus and the Apostle Paul (**19:13-14**). They knew of Paul's teaching and power and so they wanted in on the action. They decided they would use the name of Jesus like Paul had been preaching and teaching. Don't overlook this point- **verse 13** says they knew Paul was preaching Jesus. We have already tracked what he preached- justification is by grace alone, through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

According to **verse 15**, Sceva and his sons were casting out demons and shouting out the name of Jesus. The only problem is they didn't have the same true relationship with God that Paul had. They used the name of Jesus to try to cast out some demon and the demon responded by saying "I recognize Jesus and Paul but who are you?" According to **verse 16**, the demon possessed man leaped on them and ripped their clothes off and overpowered them so they ran for their lives naked and wounded.

There are people who live in this "sophisticated world" of ours who think it is cute to dabble around with the satanic world. They look at satanic things, read satanic books, watch satanic movies and play satanic games, thinking it is all fun and games. It is very dangerous. Stay away from these things because demons are real and they can humiliate and dominate a person. The results of this in **verses 17-20** were amazing. There are five results of Paul's ministry:

**Result #1** - This episode became known to all in Ephesus . **19:17a**

Sceva and his sons were well known and now they had been well humiliated and everyone in Ephesus was talking about it. Everyone knew about Paul and what God was doing through him. Here is something very interesting to observe. There are many religious frauds who claim they can do the miraculous. Many of them are in Los Angeles, California. Let me ask a question- have those supposed miracle workers made a great difference for the truth of God? Look at Los Angeles- the answer is no. Why? When Paul really did do these things, it shook the whole city of Ephesus because God was in it.

**Result #2** - This episode causes a fear of God. **19:17b**

The specific fear would be that you do not want to use the name of Jesus lightly or flipantly. **When God's Spirit is truly working, there will be a fear and a reverence for God.** Now what I am going to say here is either right or wrong; you decide. These churches that are given to entertainment are not producing a fear and reverence for God and His Word and the Holy Spirit is not at work. So you must ask what spirit is at work. I believe many of these places are demonic.

**Result #3** - This episode caused many to magnify the name of Jesus Christ. **19:17c**

When God's true work is being done, Jesus Christ will be magnified. It is not the Holy Spirit that is magnified, it is Jesus Christ.

**Result #4** - This episode convicted many believers to get clean. **19:18-19**

Now there were real believers in Ephesus who had been dabbling in things they should not be in. God's Spirit convicted them to the point that they wanted to get clean. They came and confessed and they disclosed what they had been doing and they burned their evil books worth 50,000 pieces of silver. There is no evidence that Paul demanded this. This was not some legalistic mandate of the church. The people were convicted by God to do this. Apparently the Holy Spirit convicted them of this and they responded to the conviction. One of the best evidences of the power of God is transformation and change in a person's life.

**Result #5** - This episode causes the Word of God to grow. **19:20**

When God's people get rid of evil things, God will use it. God will work powerfully through His people and His Word will be greatly magnified and multiplied. God used His Word to actually change this part of the world.

What caused this? What had Paul actually done in Ephesus? He had gone to Ephesus and he preached and he taught the Word of God to all kinds of people who "felt right about what they believed." They were not right. They needed God's Word and they needed Jesus Christ.

You may be here today and you really feel right about your belief and you could be dangerously wrong. The truth is this- Jesus Christ is the only Person worthy of your faith because He is the only One who can save you from your sins.