

Establishing the Church at Ephesus

Acts 19:1-19:10

Beginning in August I plan to start a sermon series on the book of Ephesians. This Sunday I want to give a little background for how this church, and the churches in the area of Asia Minor were established. So turn with me to Acts 19.

19:1 And it happened, while Apollos was at Corinth, that Paul, having passed through the upper regions, came to Ephesus. And finding some disciples

2 he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" So they said to him, "We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit."

3 And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" So they said, "Into John's baptism."

4 Then Paul said, "John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus."

5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

6 And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.

7 Now the men were about twelve in all.

8 And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God.

9 But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.

10 And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

Acts 19 records the establishing of the church in Ephesus. In Paul's day, it was a city of about 200,000. Now, just to kind of give you a little background, the city of Ephesus was a Roman colony, and the capital of the Roman province of Asia. Its ruins can still be seen if you go to Modern Turkey today. Ephesus was one of the religious centers of the Roman Empire at the time. It was the home of the temple of Artemis or Diana one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

As Christians we long for Christ's church to be established and extended as His word spreads mightily and prevails. This passage shows that for that to happen, there must be evangelizing, empowering, and equipping, three themes that also figure prominently in Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

The church must be preaching the gospel, it must be empowered through God's Spirit, and pastor-teachers must be equipping the saints for the work of the ministry. All three were happening in Ephesus.

I. To establish a church there must be the evangelization of the lost.

Paul had been to Ephesus in the previous chapter, Acts 18:19. But Paul was in a hurry to get back to report to the rest of the church what God was doing through his ministry so he left quickly, promising to return to Ephesus if God willed (18:21). Paul left two strong believers there at Ephesus to continue the work, a couple, Priscilla and Aquila. Paul returned about a year later.

When he got there this time, Paul encounters a group of about 12 men whom Luke describes as "disciples" (19:1) who had "believed" (19:2).

However, as Paul talked with them, he discerned that something was not quite right.

A. The inquiry

Paul asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit when they believed. This question is important because anyone who has truly been saved has experienced the Holy Spirit working in his life.

From both Jesus' and Paul's teaching we know these things about the Holy Spirit and salvation:

At the moment of salvation:

- We are born of the Spirit. In John chapter 3 Jesus talks about this with Nicodemus.
- We are baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ. Nowhere does the Bible tell us to seek the baptism of the Spirit. It is automatic. [I Cor. 14]
- We are indwelt by the Spirit. [I Cor. 6—your body is the temple of the Spirit that is in you.]
- We are sealed by the Spirit. [Eph. 4—sealed unto the day of redemption.] ill.—Roman seal/signet/hot wax...indicated private property, do not disturb.

But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. (Rom 8:9 NKJV)

B. The ignorance

The men replied that they had not even heard that there was a Holy Spirit (v.2). Just from that statement we can see that the spiritual understanding of these men was very limited. They were disciples of John, that is John the Baptist. But obviously they had not even gotten all of John's teaching right. For John had

taught, **"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire, "(Mat 3:11 NKJV).**

And of course John had indicated that Jesus was that one who is the Christ. John said of Jesus, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) and **"I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God."** (John 1:32-34).

Perhaps these men had been taught by Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria who was also a follower of John the Baptist. Apollos had been preaching to the Jews in Ephesus about the Lord, but he only knew the baptism of John (18:25). Priscilla and Aquila explained the way of Jesus to him more adequately. And from that point Apollos went out preaching that Jesus as the Christ.

As a result, Paul explained to them that the one of whom John prophesied had come, namely, Jesus. No doubt he told them of His death on the cross as the substitute for sinners, of His resurrection from the dead, and of His ascension into heaven. When they heard the gospel, they believed in Christ and were baptized as a confession of their faith.

Some who need to be evangelized already believe and are in the church.

You're saying, "What? If they already believe and are in the church, aren't they saved?" Not necessarily! The question is, WHAT do they believe? These men believed in the message of John the Baptist, but they had not heard how Jesus had fulfilled John's preaching. Even though Luke calls them "disciples" (19:1), it is clear that they were not true disciples of Jesus.

In a similar way, there are many in our churches today who believe in God, and perhaps even believe about Jesus, but yet are still not truly saved. They have not received the Holy Spirit because they have not been saved. Is that you?

When they believed and were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, they obviously received the Holy Spirit. Just like the first Jewish believers did at Pentecost, and the first Gentile believers did at Ceasarea, they spoke in tongues and prophesied as a sign of their conversion.

To establish a church we must evangelize the lost. And second,

II. To establish a church there must be the empowerment to live.

This empowering is done through the Holy Spirit of God.

After these men believed and were baptized, Paul laid hands on them and the Holy Spirit came upon them, causing them to have the miraculous ability to speak in a language that they had not previously learned.

However, this text has led to much confusion in modern Christian circles, primarily because interpreters do not keep in mind the transitional nature of Acts.

It's very important to understand that the book of Acts is a book of "transition." It's a bridge, so to speak, between the OT and the NT. Bridges are a good thing...they help connect things...make new journeys possible. But one thing you never want to do is to park on a bridge.

A lot of churches are extremely confused doctrinally because they have decided to park on the bridge of the book of Acts. This book was never intended to be primarily a doctrinal book, but a bridge. It's a book of history that transitions us from the gospels to the church age. The Lord is in the process of doing something wonderful, beginning a new era, a new dispensation as He forms His body on earth, the church. And one of the unique things about the body of Christ is how it is comprised of everyone...not only the Jews, but all people.

In Acts 2 at Pentecost, the Jews are welcomed into the body of Christ. Then in ch. 10 in Cornelius' home the Gentiles are welcomed into the body. And now there's 1 more group for the church to bring in...the disciples of John the Baptist

Let me make two statements about the working of the Holy Spirit today:

A. All who have truly believed in Jesus Christ have received the Holy Spirit.

In Romans 8:9, Paul asserts, "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

Even the carnal Corinthians had God's Spirit dwelling in them (1 Cor. 6:19).

Paul later wrote to the Ephesians, telling them that when they believed, they had been sealed by the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as the earnest of our inheritance (Eph. 1:13-14). If a person does not have the Spirit indwelling him, he is not saved.

B. Those who have received the Spirit through faith in Christ must learn to walk in the Spirit's power.

While every genuine believer in Christ today receives the indwelling Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion, walking in the Spirit's power is not an automatic process. If it were, Paul would not have commanded us to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:16) and be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18).

Sadly, there are many who profess to know Christ, but their daily lives are more characterized by the deeds of the flesh than by the fruit of the Spirit.

III. To establish a church, there must be the equipping to labor.

Paul preached daily in the synagogue for three months in Ephesus. And surely many believed in Jesus during that time. When Paul finally ran into stiff opposition in the synagogue, he withdrew with the disciples and reasoned daily in the school of Tyrannus.

One manuscript gives us a note that says Paul taught daily from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Now, if Paul did teach for five hours every day for over two years, it adds up to 1,500-1,800 hours of teaching, a substantial amount!

Paul invested his life into this church. He equipped them for ministry. Paul would later remind the Ephesian elders, "**how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ,**" (Acts 20:20-21). And he said, "**For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God,**" (20:27).

You cannot equip others without pouring your own life into theirs. You need evangelism, empowering by God's Spirit, and equipping for a church to be established.

Sound doctrine is the essential foundation for establishing solid churches.

Nothing is so calculated to produce so flabby a Christian life and character as the absence of sound doctrine. I have never met a sickly Christian whose weakness did not include a lack of sound doctrine.

Doctrine is important because it is what you believe and what a person believes is what He lives. False doctrine promotes false living.

To establish any church, so that it is a vital force in future generations, we must devote ourselves to the teaching of God's Word.

The men who received the teaching went into the outlying areas and established churches. The result was that "**that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.**" (Acts 19:10).

Many churches were established during these two years. Probably the seven churches of Revelation were founded at this time.

Conclusion

Wouldn't it be exciting if we could substitute "Western Colorado " for the word "Asia" in verse 10.

For that to happen, we must commit ourselves to evangelizing the lost, we must daily rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to live, and we must equip the saints for the labor of the ministry.