

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

**DHW BIBLE CLASS
LESSON 20
THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES
CHAPTER 19**

INTRODUCTION

Paul, having passed through the regions of “the upper coasts”, namely, the provinces of Lycaonia, Phrygia and Galatia, came to Ephesus. He had promised to visit them when he first went to Ephesus (18:21). This was his longest stay in any mission city. Paul spent no less than two years in the city teaching and preaching the Word of God. During this time, he also wrote some letters to the church in Corinth.¹

This whole chapter is devoted to Paul’s important work in Ephesus, a city that was the metropolis of Asia. It was the centre of commerce and religion and well known for its idolatry and worship of the goddess of Artemis (its temple was one of the wonders of the world). Throughout the year, the city attracted many pilgrims and tourists from her neighbouring regions. Trade was good and the people were wealthy for they

¹ 1 Corinthians 5:9 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: . . . 6:8 But I

2 Corinthians 2:4 For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you. . . . 2:9 For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things.

earned high incomes. Apart from the tourism and trade on which the city thrived, Ephesus was a stronghold for pagan religious practices, superstition, magical arts, spiritism, astrology and idolatry.

Paul’s long stay in Ephesus was eventful. He had to contend with the worldliness of the city while maintaining his witness of the Lord Jesus Christ and defending the Christian faith. In his encounters with the Ephesians, the Holy Spirit demonstrated that the Word of God was more powerful than the spiritism and occult practices of the pagans. In this study, we see the experience of two very different groups of Jews. Their knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit were defective. Through this, the text shows what true Christianity is. In addition, the record also defends the Christian faith against misunderstandings and misrepresentations of the gospel message, which if not rebuffed and refuted, would cause confusion among believers and drive others away.

The chapter can be divided into three main sections: 1) Paul’s strengthening of the disciples in Ephesus (vv. 1-12); 2) the exaltation of the name of Jesus Christ (vv. 13-22); and 3) the vindication of believers in Ephesus (vv. 23-41).

COMMENTARY

**Paul’s Strengthening of the Disciples
in Ephesus**

Paul entered Ephesus and he met twelve men who claimed to be disciples. Paul straightaway asked them whether they had received the Holy Spirit. Why did Paul pose this question to them? They had openly

declared that they were disciples. It seemed that Paul had detected some spiritual deficiency in their behaviour and actions. Their reply seemed strange because if they were true disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, they should have known about the Holy Spirit. Paul continued with his next question: "Unto what then were ye baptised?" (v.3). A disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ ought to be baptised. It is unbiblical for one who professes to be a disciple not to be baptised in His name. The twelve men answered that they were baptised by John the Baptist. So these twelve disciples had believed in some form of teaching by John the Baptist. In his ministry, John was preaching about a coming Messiah who would baptise them with the Holy Spirit.²

Paul then explained to the twelve disciples that John's baptism was a baptism unto repentance. It means that those who were baptized by John acknowledged and sincerely confessed their sins, and were prepared to believe on the Messiah, who is none other than Christ Jesus. Hearing this, the twelve wished to be baptized "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (v.5). Paul laid his hands on them and the Holy Spirit came upon them. They spoke with "tongues and prophesied" (v.6). The coming of the Holy Spirit upon them evidenced by the speaking of tongues and prophesying was meant to show the vital difference between a disciple who has repented but has yet to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and one who has so believed. It was a special and

evident sign. On the other hand, Apollos was not baptised because "he was instructed of the Lord." He knew the Scriptures well and taught in the synagogues. There was no cause to doubt that Apollos was a true believer in spite of the fact that he knew only the baptism of John. The twelve disciples were, however, different. From this episode, we also learn that repenting, on its own, does not save a person. After repentance, the person must believe in Christ, be baptised and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Only then, is he a genuine disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. A person who fervently professes belief in Christ but who does not wish to be baptised or who delays in his baptism is not behaving according to the teachings of the Word of God. That person ought to examine whether he is truly born-again and has the Holy Spirit. If he has the Holy Spirit, then the Holy Spirit will surely lead him to go under water-baptism in keeping with God's commandment.

Power of The Lord Jesus Christ Demonstrated

As was his custom, Paul looked for a synagogue. There, he taught the Scriptures to the Jews, reasoned with them and explained to them things that concerned the kingdom of God. Paul knew the importance of grounding them in the Word of God. A number of unbelieving Jews in the synagogue hardened their hearts and publicly declared that "the way" was evil. "The way" is a new term that describes the Christian faith. Paul took a decisive action and distanced himself from these wicked wrongdoers. He also separated the twelve disciples from them by transferring the venue of his instruction to a lecture hall run by Tyrannus, who was probably not a Christian. There,

² Matthew 3:11 I indeed baptise you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost, and *with* fire:

Paul lectured and taught the Word of God daily. This continued for two years. His teaching spread to many parts of Asia. Both Jews and Greeks in the surrounding regions heard the word. It is possible that those who were converted during their visits to Ephesus went back to their cities and set up churches. The seven churches which are mentioned in Revelation could have been the result of Paul's work in Ephesus.³ God strengthened Paul's ministry by performing special miracles through him. He healed the sick and cast out demons and evil spirits. Those who touched his handkerchiefs and aprons were also healed! We must note that the inspired text specifically mentioned that it was God, not Paul, who performed the miracles. These miracles can be said to be sign-miracles, meaning that they were given to Paul's ministry.

The Exaltation of the Name of Jesus Christ

In those days in Ephesus, superstitions abound. There were many exorcists and magicians. They were like Simon Magus in Samaria (8:9), and Elymas in Cyprus (13:6). At that time, there were seven travelling Jewish exorcists, who were the sons of Sceva, a Jew and who probably named himself chief of the priests. They summoned those who were demon-possessed to them, and tried to exorcise them by saying: "We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth" (v.13). They must have

³ Revelation 1:11 Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send *it* unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

seen Paul's miracles and exorcism in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. They tried to copy Paul thinking that the pronouncement of the name of Jesus was a magical formula. They did it. But an evil spirit spoke through a victim in answer to the sons of Sceva: "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?" (v.15). The victim then pounced and overpowered them. The seven sons of Sceva struggled to free themselves and then raced out of the house, naked and wounded. These seven sons of Sceva were not born-again Christians. Using and invoking the name of Jesus did not make them true disciples of Jesus. Only those who are truly born-again Christians and who have a personal relationship with Christ, like Paul, may invoke the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in casting out evil spirits and demons.

News of the incident spread like wild fire. Soon all the visiting Jews and Greeks, including those who lived in Ephesus, knew of the episode. Fear came upon all of them and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ was magnified! As a result, many believers came forward to confess their sins. Many others who practised spurious magic acts brought out their occult books and burned them in public. They counted the cost of the books to be around fifty thousand pieces of silver or drachma. A drachma was a day's wage at that time. The total amount of books worked out to be the equivalent of A\$12,650 which was a large sum of money at that time! The most wonderful effect was that the Word of God grew mightily and prevailed. The gospel message was scattered abroad and many people became believers.

The Vindication of Believers in Ephesus

At the end of two years, Paul felt that the church at Ephesus was sufficiently strong and that it was time for him to leave. He was determined to go through Macedonia and Achaia, to visit the young churches, which he had set up, and then proceed to Jerusalem, and after that to Rome. Accordingly, he sent Timothy and Erastus ahead of him while he stayed in Asia for a season.

While Paul was planning all these and sending his two fellow labourers to Macedonia, there arose a great disturbance against "that way" (the Christian faith). A certain silversmith by the name of Demetrius called his fellow tradesmen to gather for a meeting. Like Demetrius, these men made silver shrines of the goddess Diana for sale to the local population and visiting tourists. It was a lucrative trade. The Ephesians were very proud of their temple dedicated to the goddess Diana. Demetrius told his fellow tradesmen, whose wealth came from the sales of the silver shrines, that the locals and others throughout Asia were persuaded by Paul that the silver shrines were no gods for they were made by man's hands. As a result, their occupation as silversmith will be affected. Further, the temple of their great goddess Diana, which was well-known and worshipped by all of Asia and the world, would be despised and her magnificence destroyed. On hearing this, the tradesmen were enraged and cried out in unison: "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (v.28). Soon, the whole city was filled with confusion. The mob fanaticism went out of control. They seized two of Paul's companions, Gaius and Aristarchus who were both from Macedonia, and took them into the

theatre. Paul wanted to enter into the theatre but the disciples stopped him. Some high officials from Asia, who were in Ephesus, also counselled Paul against it. They knew that it could cost him his life. Paul was thus persuaded and his life spared. Inside the theatre, pandemonium reigned and people were shouting. Many who joined the crowd did not even know the purpose of the assembly. They took a certain Alexander out of the multitude and put him before the assembly. Alexander gestured with his hand to indicate that he wanted to make his defence, but when they knew that he was a Jew, they shouted in unison: "Great is Diana of the Ephesians". This carried on for two hours!

The Town Clerk Intervened

The rioting attracted "the town clerk." He was the chief magistrate of the city. He calmed the mob and then addressed them. The first fact he dwelled on was the renowned reputation of the city of Ephesus in which the goddess of Diana was worshipped, the image of which "fell down from Jupiter?"⁴ Based on this fact, he advised them to quieten down and not to do anything rashly. Secondly, he pointed out that as Gaius, Aristarchus and Alexander were not guilty of robbing the churches nor of blaspheming their goddess (v.37), Demetrius and his craftsmen should go to the courts to settle their grievances legally and in a lawful manner. The magistrate warned that they could get into trouble if they could not give a good cause for the rioting. After that, he dismissed the assembly.

⁴ Scholarly opinion is that this image was a meteorite which fell into the city.

The masterly and authoritative speech of the magistrate was impartial and factual. He rightly observed that the Christians had not robbed the temple. While Paul had preached against idolatry, he never specifically condemned the worship of the goddess of Diana and the Ephesian Temple of Artemis. Indeed, the Christians were vindicated!

PRACTICAL VALUE

Paul's dealing with the twelve disciples reveals four essentials in Christian initiation, namely, repentance, faith in Jesus Christ, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and baptism. These four things belong together. If one has no faith in Jesus Christ, there can be no conversion. If one does not repent and profess faith in Jesus Christ, his conversion is questionable. One cannot claim to have the gift of the Holy Spirit if he has not sincerely repented and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. And if one is baptised and does not have the other three, his baptism is nonsense. Each of us ought to examine if our profession of the Christian faith is genuine. In this respect, we should be careful how we present the gospel of salvation in Christ Jesus. Many evangelistic church organizations and individual evangelists are guilty of downgrading the gospel message in order to swell the size of their congregation and their financial statements. This is wrong and totally inexcusable.

Another lesson that can never be overstated is the necessity of knowing the Word of God. It is sad that many Christians do not accord the reading and studying of the Bible with more importance. They would rather spend

their time, effort and money to accumulate earthly things, which they could not enjoy when they grow old, and which they could not take with them when they depart from their earthly vessel. Let us reason and remember the words of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 6:20): But lay up for yourselves **treasures in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. Jim Elliot the missionary, who died by the hands of the South American Aucas, whom he tried to reach with the gospel, once remarked: "He is no fool who sacrifices the things which he cannot keep for the things which he can keep forever!"

Another important lesson is that every Christian should be a law-abiding citizen. Christians should obey the laws of a country insofar as their loyalty and faith in God, and obedience to His commandments is not violated. They must reject all forms of violence and evil ways of expressing their disagreement and dissatisfaction. The chief magistrate of Ephesus observed accurately and evaluated rightly the character and conduct of the Christians in his city. Those who wield power in governments do great harm to the country when they suppress Christians and their activities. AMEN

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: Acts 19:1-7; Romans 6:3-11; Ephesians 1:13, 14.

Tuesday: Acts 19:8-12; 2 Timothy 2:15.

Wednesday: Acts 19:13-22; Romans 15:19-24.

Thursday: Acts 19:23-34; 2 Corinthians 1:8-11.

Friday: Acts 19:35-41; Romans 13:1-7.

Discussion Questions

1. What two differences are brought out between John's baptism and Christian baptism in verses 1-7? What was the significance of receiving the Holy Spirit?

2. How did Paul go about his work of preaching and teaching in Ephesus?

3. What incident happened in Ephesus that led to a great victory for Christ? What was the effect on (a) the

people; (b) believers; and (c) those who practised magic?

4. How did persecution suddenly arise? What was the cause and how was it brought down?

5. What happened to the seven sons of Sceva and why?

6. What term is used to describe the Christian life (verses 9, 23)? Do you think it is an appropriate term to describe Christianity? Why?

7. How is the economic uproar which was incited by Demetrius, the silversmith, relevant to us? Does it reveal anything about the Church in the world today? What attitude and habit should we adopt?

8. What good fruit do you see in Paul's ministry in Ephesus (verses 1-22)?
