

Acts 19:1-20

A Full Understanding of Faith – Highlights from Ephesus

- I. 19:1-7 Incomplete Faith
- II. 19:8-10 Opposition to Faith
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Introduction:

Ephesus Capital of the Roman province of Asia as of 27 BC – about 80 years earlier. At this time it was a major commercial center and growing metropolis. It rivaled Alexandria as the city second in size and importance within the Roman Empire. It was known primarily for two related things:

- **Worship of the Greek Goddess Artemis** (Roman *Diana*) Goddess of Fertility and goddess of the hunt. A huge, beautiful, world famous temple for her was located in Ephesus.
 - More on that next week.
- **Magic, witchcraft & occult practices** (largely, but not purely, connected with Artemis) Certain words called *Ephesia grammata*, Greek "Ephesian letters," were the most celebrated words of power in the classical world. People would recite them to receive special protection, carry them in written form or inscribe them on objects or clothing. Thus, magic books, spells and writing were associated with Ephesus. We might compare ancient Ephesus with Salem, MA today as far as a reputation for or name recognition with the occult or magic arts.
 - This aspect of Ephesian culture will come up in today's text.

See: Greer, John Michael. *The New Encyclopedia of the Occult*. St. Paul, MN, Llewellyn Worldwide. pp. 159-160

Cited on: http://www.themystica.org/mystica/articles/e/ephesia_grammata.html

See also: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ephesia_Grammata

I. 19:1-7 Incomplete Faith

- A. 19:1 *Disciples* The use of this word indicates that they had some measure of faith or outward commitment to the Lord.
- B. 19:2 Paul noticed that the Holy Spirit was missing in their lives. We don't know how.
- C. 19:3 This point probably links them to Apollos prior to his conversion to Christ through Priscilla and Aquila. **See 18:24-26.**

These twelve men had become disciples of sorts. They knew about repentance and baptism, but were not yet aware of Jesus or the Holy Spirit's arrival.

D. 19:4 Paul explains the ministry of John the Baptist well.

i. The Amplified Bible further clarifies:

*Acts 19:4 (AMP) And Paul said, John baptized with the baptism of repentance, continually telling the people that **they should believe in the One Who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus [having a conviction full of joyful trust that He is Christ, the Messiah, and being obedient to Him].***

ii. Here's how John explained his own ministry:

Matthew 3:11 (NKJV) 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.

E. **Application:** Many today think they are Christians but are not. They may be baptized, as these men were, but they have not been born again. They may have many good personal qualities, but they have no new life in Christ. There's no real victory over sin; no special desire for the things of God. **They lack the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.**

Romans 8:9b (NKJV) ... Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.

Therefore the Scripture tells us:

2 Corinthians 13:5a (NKJV) Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves...

This is a problem with a very simple fix now, but there will be no solution on the day of judgment. The men in the story, believed, were baptized, became followers of Jesus and received the Holy Spirit. They were prepared by Apollos, but completed by Paul.

- **Is your faith complete? Do you have a full understanding of faith - or are you one of these "almost" believers in Jesus, as found by Paul in Ephesus?**

II. 19:8-10 Opposition to Faith

A. 19:9 Three months' ministry in the synagogue ended when those who did not believe began opposing Paul's teaching about Jesus "the Way". Paul responded by simply taking his teaching elsewhere.

School of Tyrannus Tyrannus was probably a philosopher. The school probably had a long break – like a siesta – in the hot afternoon hours, making room for Paul.

B. 19:10 Opposition actually caused Paul's ministry to grow. When he moved out of the synagogue and into a more mainstream setting within the community, more people had access to his teaching about Christ.

- **Application: A full understanding of faith** means that we need not fear opposition to the Gospel. Sometimes it actually causes the growth of the church. Also remember this: Paul started out as an opponent of Christ. Jesus has a way of winning no matter what.

IV. 19:11-12 God Responds as He Chooses to Faith

- A. *unusual miracles* Miracles in general are special – and these are unusual miracles! The Bible gives us no formula for making miracles occur. It seems to explain even less why *unusual* miracles occur.
- i. The *handkerchiefs* (sweat rags) and *aprons* (worn for work) would have been the items Paul used while working at his tentmaking business.
 - ii. The church in Ephesus matured and remained very strong for many years, but we never read of this kind of miracle happening again.
 - iii. Why did it happen here? Perhaps since Ephesus was all about magic, the Lord saw fit to show that He was more powerful than the magic of Ephesus. When Moses confronted Pharaoh and the magicians of his court the Lord did that kind of thing.
- B. **Important Principle:** God meets us right where we are at the time. The Ephesians were superstitious. God didn't start by changing that. He met them right there at that point. He does that with us too – but then He expects us to grow into **a full understanding of faith**.
- i. When I first came to Christ I prayed using a Catholic practice called a *novena*, where you recite certain prayers during nine consecutive days. Soon it stopped working – and the Lord matured me through those unanswered prayers. He was drawing me into a **full understanding of faith** and away from those superstitious practices.
 - ii. Ask yourself: How has the Lord grown you since you first put your faith in Him? How has your understanding of Him increased? How has your faith deepened?

V. 19:13-17 Borrowed Faith

- A. The sons of Sceva traveled around trying to cast out demons. They didn't really know Jesus, but were no doubt impressed with the power they saw in Paul's ministry. In the occult environment of Ephesus, they began using Christ's name as an incantation or magic formula. They wanted to benefit from Christ without actually belonging to Christ, so they tried to borrow Paul's faith to make that happen.
- B. When I was a kid there was a movie theater at a mall near my house. When they let you in they ripped your ticket in half and gave you one part to prove that you had paid. My friend and I came up with a great plan. One of us went to the counter and bought a ticket and we ripped that ticket in half. Then when the crowd was heavy and the movie was about to start both of us would walk past the usher who was ripping people's tickets, having spent a little on popcorn or something. You get the idea. I think it even worked once.
- C. **Application:** **A full understanding of faith** knows that **borrowed faith** will never work. Your faith has to be your own. Your friend's faith or your family's faith cannot save you. Your faith cannot save anyone else. The faith of the other people in the church cannot save you. You have to personally put your complete faith and hope in Jesus Christ to be saved.

[having a conviction full of joyful trust that He is Christ, the Messiah, and being obedient to Him] – Acts 19:4 (AMP)

Otherwise when the enemy attacks, you're going to end up like looking like these guys – running away, beat up and naked.

- **So how about you? Do you have a genuine personal saving faith in Jesus Christ? Or have you been trying to sneak in with a borrowed faith? If your faith is not real – and really yours – you're going to get caught. And the stakes in the spiritual realm are really high.**

VI. 19:18-20 Faith and Repentance

- A. We've been talking about the witchcraft and similar practices that were so common in Ephesus. Here's what happened once the Gospel started taking root in the city. Read these three verses again. This is real repentance, which is part of a real faith – a change of mind that leads to a change in behavior.
- B. By burning these books that they had spent a lot of money on, they were cutting themselves off from these practices. They were making a clean break with their sin. They were making it as difficult as possible to turn back.
- Many people today know about Jesus, but don't know repentance. They start calling themselves Christians, but their behavior never changes.
 - A full understanding of faith includes repentance from sinful behavior.**
- C. The first message we know of that Jesus ever preached sounded like this:

Matthew 4:17 (NKJV) ... "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

- D. Real repentance means taking the title deed to your life and signing it over to Christ. It means letting Him call the shots from that point on.
- E. The believers in Ephesus had several choices. They could have said:
- “OK I believe in Jesus,” and tried to continue practicing magic.
 - “I believe in Jesus, and therefore I won't practice magic anymore, but still held on to all their their books. It's easy to rationalize: They cost a lot of money. I'll just use them for reference purposes. They might come in handy some day if I need to explain to some other believer why this or that is right or wrong.
 - What they actually did was burn the books.
- If someone wanted to prove in a court of law that you have repented of your sin, what evidence would they have to show the judge and jury?
- F. **FAITH = Forsaking All I Take Him** – Phillips Brooks (*O Little Town of Bethlehem*)