

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Three Episodes in Ephesus

Acts 18:24–19:20

Let's take our Bibles together and turn to Acts 18. Our passage today is Acts 18:24–19:20. And we are going to look this morning at three episodes in the city of Ephesus.

And these three episodes teach us about the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, and the life-threatening powerlessness that comes from the Holy Spirit's absence. Let me say that a little more simply. If you have the Holy Spirit, you have life and power. If you don't have the Holy Spirit, you are lifeless and powerless. That's what this passage teaches.

And here's why this matters. Have you ever heard of man named John Wesley? About 1,700 years after the Apostle Paul, God raised up Wesley as a powerful evangelistic force in England. Through him, the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit were unleashed across that nation.¹

Yet Wesley's ministry got off to a rocky start. He was the son of a clergyman. He was raised by a deeply godly mother, Susanna Wesley. From a young age, John was brilliant and spiritually inclined. He attended Oxford University. He became a professor of Greek and logic. Along with his brother Charles and his friend George Whitefield, he formed the "Holy Club" at Oxford, a group devoted to strict spiritual discipline and a life patterned after Christ.

Wesley even sailed to America as a missionary, aiming to evangelize in Georgia, which at that time was a harsh land filled with ex-criminals, fortune-seekers, and Indians. But Wesley failed miserably. He returned to England broken, discouraged, and deeply troubled about his own salvation. In his journal he wrote, "I went to America to convert the Indians, but, oh, who shall convert me?"²

Here's the issue that confronted John Wesley. At that point in his life he was unsaved! Though outwardly religious and intensely disciplined, he was not born again. He didn't have the power of the Holy Spirit. To use Paul's words in 2 Timothy 3:5, he had the appearance of godliness but without the power.

But God didn't leave Wesley in that wretched state. On May 24, 1738, he famously attended a meeting on Aldersgate Street, where Martin Luther's preface to Romans was being read. As he listened, he recorded in his journal, "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation ... and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine."³ From that moment forward, everything changed.⁴

Is it possible for a person to be outwardly religious and at the same time unsaved? Yes, it's possible! And I would say that in our day in America, it's not uncommon. There may even be some here today who are like the unsaved Wesley on Aldersgate Street.⁵

¹ What follows is taken and reworded from Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 29. See also chapter 15 in Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1970).

² Quoted in Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 29.

³ Quoted in Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 29.

⁴ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 29 adds, "John Wesley's 'warming' was the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Amazingly, until Aldersgate, John Wesley, a man who knew more theology and was more dedicated than most believers, did not know Christ or the saving power of the Holy Spirit. He was in the church but was condemned!"

⁵ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 29: "Hundreds of thousands of people profess some type of belief in Christ, display a reverence for God, go to church on Sundays, contribute to the offering, sit at the Lord's Table, and admire the ethical teachings of the Lord — but are as lost as John Wesley before Aldersgate."

And what we're going to read about today in **Acts 18 and 19** is a precursor to John Wesley. We're going to see a group of people centuries before Wesley, who were unsaved God-fearers. We're going to see a man named Apollos who was even *mighty* in the Scriptures. But he didn't have the *mighty power* of the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of him.⁶

We're going to see a group of twelve men who knew the baptism of John the Baptist, but they didn't know about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. But in that state, just like Wesley, God graciously reached them with the truth of the gospel. And they got saved. **And I can't help but wonder, maybe God wants to do something similar today at Messiah Bible Church.**

Now here's the setting for what happened in **Acts 18**. If you remember from last time, Paul made a brief stop in Ephesus on his way to Antioch (see map below).



Paul goes back to Antioch⁷

Paul travelled from Corinth to Ephesus with his new ministry partners, Priscilla and Aquila. And he left them in Ephesus before he went to Caesarea, Jerusalem, and then finally to Antioch. This is all recorded in **Acts 18:18–23**. And Priscilla and Aquila became strategic partners with Paul, even hosting a church in their home in Ephesus.

By the way, let me say this, Priscilla is often mentioned first before her husband Aquila in the Bible, which is very unusual. In **Acts 18:18** she's mentioned first. In **Acts 18:26** she's mentioned first. And some people have speculated that's because she was more influential than her husband. And maybe that's the case. **I know that people refer to Sanja and me as Tony and Sanja, but sometimes it's Sanja and Tony. And sometimes it's Sony and Tanja. That's okay too.** But it doesn't really matter to me who's mentioned first, because we're a team.

And for this married couple, Priscilla and Aquila, they were a team. **In fact they were a great team, as married couples serving Christ should be.** And so Paul leaves Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus to get the church off the ground, and then he goes on to Antioch.⁸

But here's the thing. They weren't the only show in town. Check this out. Look at **verse 24**.

²⁴ Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria,⁹ came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures.

⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 784 disagrees: "Apollos had been 'instructed' (κατηχημένος) in the 'Way of the Lord,' i.e., concerning the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus as Israel's Messiah and Savior. Luke thus portrays him as a believer in Jesus."

⁷ Atlas taken from Logos Bible Study, Computer software. *Logos Bible Study Atlas* (Bellingham: Faithlife, LLC), November 13, 2025. Some geographical points added by author.

⁸ CHRYSOSTOM: "It was not for nothing that [Paul] left [Priscilla and Aquila] at Ephesus. For Apollos's sake the Spirit planned this, so that he might advance upon Corinth with greater force." Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 231.

⁹ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 29: "Alexandria, the place of his birth, rivaled Athens's reputation for knowledge. The greatest library in the world was in Alexandria. That city was the home of Euclid, Porphyry, Plotinus, and Philo. The Septuagint was accomplished there. Apollos represented an amazing synthesis of Greek and Hebrew learning." Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 783: "Jews had been settling in Egypt for several centuries, numbering several hundred thousand in the first century; synagogues are attested as early as the third century BC. It is estimated that 100,000 Jews lived in Alexandria, the city founded by Alexander the Great."

So there's this Jewish guy named Apollos who was extremely eloquent. Literally, he was "a man of words," which means he was learned and articulate. He was cultured.

And he was competent in the Scriptures. Literally it says that he was "mighty in the Scriptures"—the OT Scriptures, of course!

But does he know Jesus? Well, sort of. Look at **verse 25**.

²⁵ *He had been instructed in the way of the Lord.*¹⁰

Okay, so he does know Jesus.

And being fervent in spirit,

Literally this means being boiled up in spirit.¹¹ Not capital-S "Spirit" but little-s "spirit."¹² In other words, this guy was passionate.¹³ He was zealous for God and for the Scriptures. That's great.

And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus,

That's great too!

though he knew only the baptism of John.

Huh. That's interesting. He only knew the baptism of John? What does that mean?

Let's try to put this all together. So this guy, Apollos, knows his Bible. He is competent in the OT Scriptures. He knows about Jesus. He knows that Jesus is the Messiah. He knows that John the Baptist, the forerunner to the Messiah, baptized Jesus. He probably knows about Jesus's moral teachings. He probably knows about Jesus's miracles. He probably knows that Jesus has come to save his people from their sins. John the Baptist said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (**John 1:29**).

Maybe Apollos has an inkling of God's plan of salvation through Jesus Christ, but he doesn't know the particulars.¹⁴ He doesn't know about Jesus's *crucifixion*. He doesn't know about Jesus's *resurrection*. He doesn't know about Jesus's *commission* – "Go into all the world and make disciples baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (**Matt 28:19**). Why do I say that? Because he only knew the baptism of John.¹⁵

By the way, this is not entirely surprising in the ancient world.¹⁶ This is roughly twenty years after Jesus's death and resurrection, and word had gotten out about John the Baptist and his work in some places. But word about Jesus's resurrection hadn't. **I read once that after the American Revolution, there were colonialists in Appalachia who didn't know about American independence even twenty years**

¹⁰ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 391: "This does not refer to the gospel, but to biblical truth in general, especially the truth of the Hebrew Scriptures." MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 161: "That Apollos had been instructed in the way of the Lord does not mean he was already a Christian (cf. v. 26). The phrase the way of the Lord is an Old Testament term for instruction in the things of God."

¹¹ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 591: "The term literally means 'boiling' or 'seething' (Josephus, *Ant.* 13.12.6 §345). It is often used in a positive context about emotions, as here. The only two NT uses are here and in Rom. 12:11."

¹² Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 392: "He was boiling, not in the Holy Spirit, but in his human spirit." Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 785 disagrees: "The reference to 'spirit/Spirit' (*πνεῦμα*) should be understood as a reference to the Holy Spirit. Apollos's witness was empowered by God's Spirit."

¹³ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 29: "He exemplified Lloyd-Jones's definition of preaching: 'logic on fire.'"

¹⁴ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 29: "Apollos was a superior man. He was in the forefront wherever he went — and yet he did not fully know Christ! He 'taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John.' He had been a disciple of John the Baptist, he had obediently been baptized into repentance, and he was looking for the coming Messiah. But he did not know the meaning of the cross. He was not familiar with the fact of the Resurrection or the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost."

¹⁵ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 162: "John's baptism was one of preparation for Messiah's coming (Luke 1:16–17). Apollos accepted John the Baptist's message that Messiah was coming. He even believed that Jesus was that Lamb of God (John 1:29) and Messiah. He surely expounded with force and persuasion the Scriptures that pointed to Jesus. But he did not understand the significance of Christ's death and resurrection. Nor was he acquainted with the coming of the Spirit and the birth of the church on the Day of Pentecost."

¹⁶ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 165: "That Paul would encounter followers of John the Baptist nearly a quarter of a century after his death is not unusual. J. B. Lightfoot notes that such groups still existed in the second century (*Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* [reprint of the 1879 edition; Grand Rapids: Zondervan], 402ff.)."

afterwards.¹⁷ People would run into them in the sticks, and they would ask, “How’s England treating us?”

And they were told, “We’re not an English colony anymore. Haven’t you heard?”
“No I haven’t!”

Something like that happens here! So what’s going to happen with Apollos whose information on Jesus is accurate, but it’s twenty years out of date? Well, watch this. God’s going to get a hold of this guy! Look at **verse 26**.

²⁶ *He [Apollos] began to speak boldly in the synagogue,*

Zeal without knowledge, right? Not full knowledge anyway.
but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

Priscilla and Aquila are disciples of the Apostle Paul. They know the full counsel of God and the full plan of redemption.

And they say, “Look, Apollos, you’re really passionate, man! We can tell that you fear God and you love God. And you love his Word. But haven’t you heard what happened to Jesus?”

“No, what happened?”

“They crucified him. The Jews and the Romans got together and they murdered him on a cross.”

“Are you serious? That’s awful!”

“You’re right, it’s awful! But get this. That was part of God’s plan. That’s how God is bringing about salvation for the world. Haven’t you read **Isaiah 53**? ‘He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities... [and by] his wounds we are healed’ (**53:5**). And three days after his death, God raised Jesus from the dead. And now anyone and everyone who turns from their sins and puts their faith in Christ can be forgiven. That’s what we’re telling people about in Ephesus. That’s what we told people in Rome and in Corinth, and other apostles are spreading this truth all over the world. And that’s what you need to embrace and believe too, Apollos.”¹⁸

Now Luke doesn’t say explicitly what happens with Apollos. But it seems, in light of what follows, that he received their message. Aquila and Priscilla took him aside so as not to embarrass him publicly, and they “explained to him the way of God more accurately” (**18:26**).¹⁹ So God used these two tentmakers, a man and a woman, to educate this brilliant, eloquent, powerful preacher. And to his credit, Apollos was teachable. He received their message.²⁰

In fact, I believe that Apollos is the most likely candidate as the author of the book of **Hebrews** in the NT. “Who wrote the book of Hebrews, Pastor Tony?” I don’t know. And I don’t think we’ll find out on this side of eternity. But a strong candidate is this guy in **Acts 18**, Apollos, who came to faith through the faithful ministry of these two tentmakers.

By the way, back to John Wesley for a moment. It was a group of humble, uneducated Moravians whom God used to lead John Wesley to Christ. John Wesley, the Oxford grad and Greek professor, found out in Georgia that these Moravians had something that he didn’t have.²¹ And sometimes amazingly God uses the “weak” in the world to shame the “strong” (**1 Cor 1:27**).

So these tentmakers corrected Apollos. And then they end up sending him to Corinth where Paul and they had just recently planted a church. So, **verse 27** says,

¹⁷ See Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 29.

¹⁸ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 29: “They took the young man aside and ministered Christ to him. Maybe they washed his feet and gave him a good Sabbath supper. They certainly lovingly completed his theological picture. Apollos of Alexandria at this time became born again — baptized with the Spirit. This godly couple’s attitude made all the difference.”

¹⁹ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 162: “Instead of publicly instructing Apollos, they tactfully took him aside, possibly into their home, to speak to him. Having done so, they explained to him the rich fullness of the truth concerning the Messiah’s atoning death and resurrection. That the mighty preacher and scholar would consent to be taught by a lowly tentmaker and his wife attests to his godly humility.”

²⁰ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 393: “He already knew that Yeshua was the Messiah; now he also knew about His substitutionary death, burial, and resurrection.”

²¹ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 29.

²⁷ And when [Apollos] wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote²² to the disciples to welcome him.²³ When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed,²⁴ for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

So this new believer got to work sharing Christ, strengthening the church, and refuting unbelievers. In time Apollos became so influential in Corinth, that people started creating their own little Apollos fan club. When Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, there were these little pockets of tribalism that had formed. People were saying “**I follow Apollos.**” O yeah, well, “**I follow Paul.**” **Everyone had their own rockstar evangelist.** And Paul had to rebuke them, “Is Christ divided?” (1 Cor 1:12–13). “**We’re all on the same team here, folks.**”²⁴

So Apollos became extremely influential in Corinth. And **verse 28** says that he...
... powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

Now here’s what I want to do today. Go ahead and take your notes and write this down. I know it’s taken me a little while to get to this first point, but go ahead and write this down.

Here’s what I want to covey in the outline. I want to prove to you from the text that “ignorance isn’t bliss.” I want to give you three points of evidence from the text today that proves ignorance isn’t bliss. Here’s the first point of evidence:

1) Preaching without knowledge of the **cross** (Acts 18:24–28)

Preaching without knowledge of the cross is evidence that *ignorance isn’t bliss*. Priscilla and Aquila saw that Apollos had ability. They saw that he was mighty in the Scriptures. But they also saw that he lacked the full counsel of God and the full revelation concerning Jesus Christ. And instead of allowing Apollos to continue languishing in his ignorance, they corrected him. They explained to him the way of God more accurately” (18:26). And to Apollos’s credit, he received their correction and became a better man because of it.²⁵ In fact, I would argue that he got saved and filled with the Spirit as a result of their influence.

Now while this was happening in Ephesus, what was Paul doing? Well, look at **Acts 19:1**.

¹ And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus.

When we last saw Paul, he had travelled from Corinth to Ephesus to Caesarea to Jerusalem and then to Antioch. And **Acts 18:23** says after he spent some time there (in Antioch) he embarked on his third missionary journey. And he went from one place to the next “through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples” (Acts 18:23). So he went back to these places where he planted churches previously and made sure that they were doing okay.²⁶ And he strengthened them. “**Keep teaching the Word. Keep following Christ. Keep growing as a disciple. Keep pressing on even though you’re persecuted. I’ve been persecuted too. Here are my scars.**” He strengthened them.

And eventually, according to **verse 1**, Paul came to Ephesus (see map). Now unlike Paul’s second missionary journey, Paul takes a different route this time. Instead of going from Galatia to Phrygia across the sea to Philippi and Thessalonica and Athens and Corinth, and then across the sea to Ephesus. This time Paul

²² Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 397: “The mention of the Ephesian brothers who provided a letter of recommendation for Apollos is significant because it is the first clear evidence that a church had by now been established in Ephesus.”

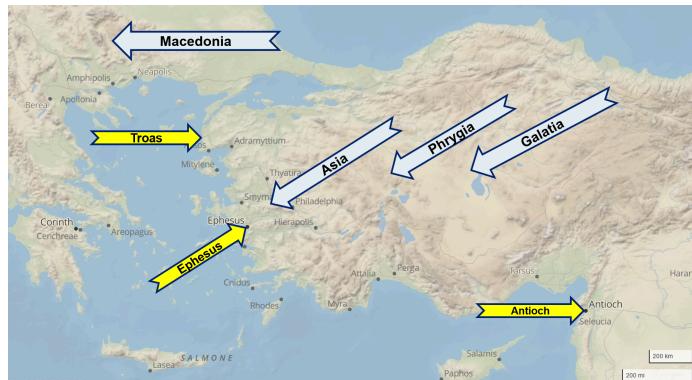
²³ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 593: “Romans 16:1–2 is an example of such a commendation, and the letter of Acts 15:23–29 serves a similar function (also 2 Cor. 3 alludes to such a letter).”

²⁴ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 593: “This brief portrait helps us to appreciate why Paul sees Apollos as a colleague in 1 Cor. 1–4 (esp. 3:9, they are fellow workers of God). They will also cross paths in Ephesus, according to 1 Cor. 16:12, where Paul reports he has urged him to come to Corinth later.”

²⁵ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 88: “Apollos’s response challenges the pride which resides deep within the recesses of our hearts. None of us like to be told we were wrong or came up short. In such moments, Satan tempts us to harden our hearts and shift the blame onto others. Indeed, Satan wants nothing less than to disrupt the fellowship of the church and to render the gifts of God’s people ineffective. Had Priscilla and Aquila remained silent, they would have given in to the temptation to prioritize their self-preservation—another form of pride—for fear of a harsh response from Apollos. Had Apollos responded with resentment or anger, he too would have been guilty of pride.”

²⁶ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 782–3: “When he strengthened ‘all the disciples’ in this region, he evidently visited the churches in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch.”

goes straight from Galatia and Phrygia “inland” to Ephesus.²⁷ He takes a more direct route. If you remember he tried to go this way earlier, but the Holy Spirit blocked him. Now the Holy Spirit is giving him a green light to go directly to Ephesus.



Paul returns to Ephesus²⁸

And Ephesus is the place where he told the believers earlier, “if God wills, I will return to you” (Acts 18:21). Sure enough, God wills it. And this city becomes even more strategic than Antioch (if you can believe that) for the spread of the gospel in the coming years.

And so in Acts 19:1, it says,

*Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples.*²⁹

Now just a point of clarification. These weren’t disciples of Christ, as we’ll see in just a moment. These were disciples of John the Baptist.³⁰ That’s important. Remember that!

² And he said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”³¹

I guess the Apostle Paul sussed out that the guys don’t have what they *should* have.³² Because faith in Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit go together like peanut butter and jelly.³³

²⁷ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 783: “The journey from Antioch, the capital of the province of Syria, to Ephesus, the capital of the province of Asia, on this route was a journey of 1300 kilometers (ca. 800 miles), requiring nine weeks of walking if we assume one day of rest per week. The fact that Paul did not sail from Antioch to Ephesus but walked via an arduous inland route confirms Paul’s concern for the consolidation of the churches that he had established. If he indeed passed through Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch, this would have been his third visit after establishing the churches in these cities.”

²⁸ Atlas taken from Logos Bible Study, Computer software. *Logos Bible Study Atlas* (Bellingham: Faithlife, LLC), November 13, 2025. Some geographical points added by author.

²⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 788: “Luke does not indicate where, specifically, Paul met these disciples of John—probably not in the synagogue which Priscilla and Aquila attended, since they would have already taught them the full content of the Christian faith, as they taught Apollos.”

³⁰ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 164: “*Mathētēs* (‘disciple’) simply means ‘learner’ or ‘follower’ and does not always in the New Testament refer to Christians (although every Christian is a disciple of Jesus Christ). The Bible speaks of the disciples of the Pharisees (Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33) and of John the Baptist (Matt. 9:14; 11:2; Luke 5:33; 7:18–19; 11:1; John 1:35; 3:25). Even all those called disciples of Jesus Christ were not saved. John 6:66 says, ‘As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew, and were not walking with Him anymore.’”

³¹ CHYRSOSTOM: “And [Paul] does not ask them, ‘Do you believe in Jesus?’ but ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit?’ For he knew that they had not. And he wished them to acknowledge this, so that they might learn what they lacked and ask for it.” Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 232.

³² Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 788: “Since Paul believed and taught that being a Christian and having received God’s Spirit is one and the same reality, his opening question expresses suspicion, designed to reveal whether they were Christians or not.”

³³ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 788: “Paul had doubts that theirs was a genuine Christian commitment; he seems to have deduced from their behavior, or from their talk, that there was no evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit ($\pi\tau\vee\tilde{\eta}\mu\alpha\ \tilde{\alpha}\gamma\iota\omega$) in their lives. Paul’s question goes straight to the point of what it means to be a Christian: the characteristic of a genuine believer in Jesus is not someone who is immersed with the correct formula, but who has faith combined with the Holy Spirit, whose presence is evident in the lives of Christians (whether through prophetic manifestations or through transformed behavior).”

And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."³⁴

Huh? Okay, what's going on here with these guys?³⁵

Listen, let me try to explain. There are two instances in Scripture where the indwelling of the Holy Spirit follows conversion. The first instance was at Pentecost in **Acts 2**. And that was a unique, transitional period where God first empowered his saints with a visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit. So the disciples in the upper room were saved, they believed in Jesus's death. They believed in his resurrection. But they weren't yet indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Not until Pentecost. **And at Pentecost (Acts 2), the Holy Spirit came down and lit them up like a Christmas tree.**

The other instance was in Samaria (**Acts 8:14–17**), where Samaritans got saved through the preaching of Philip. But God delayed the coming of the Holy Spirit until Peter and John came and laid hands on them. That was a unique situation. I don't know for sure why God delayed the filling of the Holy Spirit, but I think it was because God wanted to affirm in the minds of the apostles that non-Jews were now saved and part of the family of God. Peter and John needed that visible authentication.

But other than that—other than those two instances—the Holy Spirit comes upon a person at conversion. In fact, in the reformed tradition, the understanding is that regeneration precedes conversion and the verbalizing of one's faith. Others would articulate it as coterminous—in other words, your demonstration of faith is simultaneous with the regenerative work of the Spirit.³⁶ Either way, you don't get saved and then later receive the Holy Spirit. That's not normative.

Let me put it this way, "If you're saved, then you're indwelt by the Spirit. And if you're indwelt with the Spirit, then you're saved." "If you're not saved, then you're not indwelt by the Holy Spirit. If you're not indwelt by the Spirit, then you're not saved." Everyone with me? Romans 8:9 says, "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him."³⁷

So when I see these "disciples" who don't have the Holy Spirit, I assume "unsaved."³⁸ And I think the Apostle Paul assumes likewise.³⁹ Look at **verse 3**.

³⁸ And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." ⁴ 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."⁴⁰

Now stay with me here, because I want to be clear about what's happening. These individuals, similar to Apollos, have heard about John the Baptist. And maybe they've even heard about how John the Baptist baptized Jesus. But they haven't heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. They haven't heard about his death and resurrection.⁴¹

³⁴ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 399: "What they would not be aware of, if they had not heard of Jesus' death and resurrection and of the event at Pentecost, was that this proclamation of John had been fulfilled in Christ. Evidently that was the case with this group. They had not heard that the Spirit had been poured out. They were unaware of Pentecost."

³⁵ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 395: "They knew from what John had preached that the baptism of the Holy Spirit was coming sometime in the future and that it would be the Messiah who would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:11; Mk. 1:8; Lk. 3:16). So, the very fact that they had not even heard that the Spirit had begun His ministry of Spirit baptism shows that they had left the land long before Acts 2; otherwise, they would have heard about it."

³⁶ For more on this, see the discussion between D.A. Carson and Mark Dever on the 9Marks podcast:

<https://www.9marks.org/episode/books-d-carson/>

³⁷ See also Gal 3:2–3; 1 Cor 12:3; Eph 1:13–14; Titus 3:5–6. For implicit not explicit evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence in all believers, see 1 Cor 6:19; 12:13; 2 Cor 6:16; Jude 19.

³⁸ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 165: "Their answer 'No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit' confirmed to the apostle that they were not yet Christians. That they were unacquainted with the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost showed that they were in fact Old Testament saints."

³⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 788: "Unless these disciples were Gentiles who had received, perhaps, 'garbled reports' of John's teaching propagated in Asia Minor, which omitted John's reference to the Coming One who would immerse people in the Spirit (Luke 3:16), we must assume that they (as Jewish disciples of John) had not heard that the Holy Spirit, promised by the prophets, was bestowed on the day of Pentecost, or that they had not connected their baptism with the reality of the Holy Spirit."

⁴⁰ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 395: "This verse contains the very last mention of John the Baptist in the New Testament."

⁴¹ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 399–400: "They knew only John's preparatory message. But John had prepared them well, and they immediately responded to Paul's good news that Christ the Messiah had come; they were baptized in his name (v. 5). Paul then laid his hands on them, and they received the Spirit."

Some scholars have concluded, and I know why people conclude this, that these individuals were saved under the Old Covenant, as OT saints, and now they'll transition into NT saints. Here's my problem with that. Maybe that's the case, but when the veil was torn... when Christ's atonement was made on the cross... the OT saints who had died before that were redeemed by Christ's blood. And the Old Covenant was superseded by the New Covenant of Christ's blood. And from that point onward, no one was "saved" without faith in Christ and faith in his finished work on the cross. There aren't dual opportunities for salvation after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

So I believe that these "John the Baptist disciples" in Ephesus were unsaved when Paul got there.⁴²

That's my take on this passage. Not everyone agrees with me.⁴³ But there you go.

Now whether you agree with me or not, I think we can all agree that God displayed his mercy with this group of "John the Baptist followers." God, in his mercy, used the Apostle Paul to reach this group. And God used Paul to reveal to them the full gospel of Jesus Christ.⁴⁴ And he helped dispel their ignorance.⁴⁵

Look at **verse 5**.

⁵ *On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them,⁴⁶ and they began speaking in tongues⁴⁷ and prophesying. ⁷ There were about twelve men in all.*

Write this down as #2 in your notes. This is the second of three episodes in Ephesus proving that "Ignorance isn't Bliss." The first of those episodes involved preaching theology without the cross (Acts 18:24–28). The second involves...

2) Discipleship without knowledge of the **Spirit** (Acts 19:1–7)

The Spirit's presence was manifested here in Ephesus by their speaking in tongues and prophesying. That happens several times in this apostolic era. And what happens here is very similar to what happened in Jerusalem at Pentecost and with the Samaritans in **Acts 8** at the "Samaritan Pentecost."

Now this is a controversial text. And there are a lot of debated issues at work here including the speaking in tongues.⁴⁸ So let me give you might take on this.

In terms of the speaking in tongues and prophesying in this passage, there are a number of ways that the Holy Spirit makes his presence felt in a Christian's life. The Scriptures make that clear. Sometimes it's speaking in tongues and prophesying. Sometimes the Holy Spirit's presence was experienced through an outpouring of

⁴² Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 91: "Their designation as 'disciples' is crucial. The designation raises the question, disciples of what? Who or what did these "disciples" believe in? It appears they held to an 'almost Christianity.' They believed as much as they had been taught to believe. They did not, however, know about the Holy Spirit (v 2)... Similarly, Christians today must exercise caution and wisdom when dealing with someone who claims to follow Christ but fails to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit. Just because someone claims to follow Jesus does not mean that they have truly been saved. We should ask, does this person actually profess the gospel? And how does this person's life evidence the transformative power of the gospel?"

⁴³ For example, Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 599 writes, "The text seems clear they have come to faith in Jesus (*πιστεύσαντες, pisteusantes*), so their problem is like that of Apollos, knowing about Jesus but not the work of the Spirit that is also a part of the promise."

⁴⁴ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 395: "Those who were baptized by John identified themselves with his 'back-to-God movement' and committed themselves to accepting whomever he pointed out to be the Messiah. Paul now explained to them that the One who came after the Baptist was Yeshua. John's other disciples who had stayed in the land had believed on Him."

⁴⁵ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 92: "Paul models how to move people from what we might call an incipient faith—that is, an anticipatory faith—into the fullness of the Christian faith."

⁴⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 400: "As throughout Acts, there is no set pattern. The Spirit came at various times and in various ways. What is consistent is that the Spirit is always a vital part of one's initial commitment to Christ and a mark of every believer."

⁴⁷ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 600: "This is the final mention of tongues in Acts (2:2–4, 9–11, 26–27; 10:45–46; 19:5–6). The association of tongues and prophecy is like Acts 2. This special distribution confirms that the Spirit has come and shows how John's disciples are completed in their faith, pointing to the fact that John did point to Jesus."

⁴⁸ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 164: "Much controversy surrounds the spiritual status of these men. Those who insist they were already Christians use this passage as a proof text for their view that receiving the Holy Spirit is a subsequent, postsalvation, or 'second blessing,' experience. Such an interpretation, however, is untenable. First, it commits the methodological error of failing to consider the transitional nature of Acts, which means that the experiences and phenomena described in Acts are not normative for today. Second, this is a faulty interpretation because it commits the comparative scriptural error. Other texts make obvious that this passage cannot be used to teach that some Christians today may not have the Holy Spirit. That would contradict the explicit teaching of the New Testament epistles, which declare unequivocally that every Christian receives the Spirit at salvation (1 Cor. 6:19; 12:13; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 1:13), and define those without the Spirit as unsaved (Rom. 8:9; Jude 19)."

joy. Sometimes the Holy Spirit's presence was felt through an increased boldness to speak about Christ (Acts 4:8; 4:31; 13:10). Sometimes it's the leading of the Spirit (Rom 8:14). Sometimes it's the conviction of sin accompanied by the desire to mortify the flesh (Rom 8:13; Gal 5:24). There's also the fruit of the Spirit which is evidence of the presence of the Spirit in a Christian's life (Gal 5:22–23). **So don't ever let anyone tell you that you're not indwelt with the Spirit unless you speak in tongues. That doesn't square with Scripture. The important point here is that the Holy Spirit's presence was demonstrated in a tangible way. That was part of the assurance that NT believers had that they were saved.**⁴⁹

And the question I have for you this morning isn't, "Do you speak in tongues as a demonstration of the Spirit?" It's more simply, "Is the Holy Spirit's presence discernible in your life? You might say, "Pastor Tony I don't speak in tongues and prophesy like they do in the book of Acts." Okay, I don't either. But do you have the joy of the Holy Spirit? Is the fruit of the Holy Spirit being manifested in your life? Do the sense the Holy Spirit's conviction over sin? Are the gifts of the Holy Spirit being manifested in your life?

And don't just consider the "sign gifts." What about serving? What about teaching? What about giving? What about faith? What about leadership? What about hospitality and mercy? Can you sense the Holy Spirit's impact upon your life? And here's something to ask others—Do other Christians identify the Holy Spirit's presence in your life?

I heard a pastor say once that before he got saved, he could sin and sin and sin and there was just a little bit of guilt about that sin. But now after faith in Christ, he says, "When I sin, there is such strong conviction that comes into my life. It's terrible! It's terrible, but it's wonderful." Because it's evidence of my salvation. The Holy Spirit's conviction is evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence inside of you, a deposit of your future inheritance.

Some of you possibly don't sense the conviction of the Holy Spirit because you've been ignoring his conviction again and again, and your conscience is seared to the point you don't even know if he's there anymore. Don't do that! If that's you today, then I challenge you to repent of your sin and ask God to re-sensitize your heart to the convictions of the Spirit. And stop grieving him (Eph 4:30).

Others of you possibly don't sense the conviction of the Holy Spirit, because you're unsaved. You don't have the Holy Spirit living inside of you! It doesn't have to be like that. Ignorance isn't bliss. You can have your sins forgiven, and the power of the Holy Spirit deposited inside of you today.

Thirdly. Write this down. Here's addition evidence that ignorance isn't bliss.

3) Spirituality without **faith** in **Christ** (Acts 19:8–20)

What happens in the following verses is one of the saddest and one of the funniest events in Scripture. It'd be even more funny, if it wasn't so sad.⁵⁰

Look at **verse 8**.

⁸ And [Paul] entered the synagogue

Paul was fresh off converting these "John the Baptist disciples" in Ephesus.

⁴⁹ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 92: "When the apostle laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit indwelled them, which caused all twelve in the group to speak in tongues and prophesy (v 6–7). This outward sign confirmed the inward spiritual reality that had taken place in their hearts. Four occasions like this occur in the book of Acts, but we should not view this kind of sign as normative for the Christian church across all the ages. The event described here occurs in the context of apostolic ministry. The church today does not operate within this same context."

⁵⁰ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 404: "It is interesting that the targeted demon, not Paul, was responsible for their undoing. Luke must have enjoyed writing this episode. It is filled with humor."

and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom⁵¹ of God.⁵²⁹ But when some became stubborn⁵³ and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples⁵⁴ with him,⁵⁵ reasoning daily in the hall⁵⁶ of Tyrannus.⁵⁷

So similar to Corinth, Paul gets frustrated with the Jews and changes strategies. And he goes to the “hall of Tyrannus” which was probably a public gathering place in Ephesus full of mostly Gentiles.

¹⁰ This continued for two years,⁵⁸ so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord,⁵⁹ both Jews and Greeks.

People came to Ephesus from all over Asia because Ephesus was a major metropolitan area.⁶⁰ Some estimate that the population of Ephesus was something like 200,000 people at this time.⁶¹ The only larger cities in the Roman Empire were Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome.

And if you remember, God didn’t allow Paul to go to Asia earlier to preach the gospel. He got blocked by the Spirit and sent to Macedonia (**Acts 16:6–10**). But now, God is bringing Asia to Paul to hear the gospel in Ephesus!⁶² This probably included those communities in Asia that later became the seven churches of

⁵¹ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 173: “Preaching the kingdom of God encompasses more than the eschatological thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth. To teach the kingdom of God is to teach the things concerning Christ and salvation (cf. Acts 28:31) and righteousness (Rom. 14:17). It is to teach how to enter the sphere of salvation and live there in communion with God.”

⁵² Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 93: “The coming of Christ has inaugurated the long-expected kingdom of God. This kingdom, however, did not come through a brilliant military conquest of worldly rulers. Christ established his rule over the cosmos through his humble death on the cross. Through his life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Christ ushered in the beginnings of the kingdom, which will culminate in resplendent power upon the second coming of the King.”

⁵³ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 173: “Hardened is from *sklērunō*, a word always used in the New Testament to speak of a heart hardened against God (Rom. 9:18; Heb. 3:8, 13, 15; 4:7). The imperfect tense of the verb shows that the hardening was a process. Over the course of Paul’s three-month ministry in the Ephesian synagogue, some hearts gradually hardened against the gospel. When the truth is rejected repeatedly, it hardens the heart, and the message of salvation becomes an ‘aroma from death to death’ (2 Cor. 2:16).”

⁵⁴ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 791: “Luke also does not tell us where Paul took the new believers; the grammar of the Greek sentence appears to suggest that he took them to the ‘hall of Tyrannus’ where he lectured, but the main verb (ἀφώρισεν, ‘to separate, take away’) is not linked with a geographical term or a building. The new community of followers of Jesus could have met in the private house of one of the believers (1 Cor 16:19 mentions a house church meeting in the home of Priscilla and Aquila).”

⁵⁵ JOHN CALVIN: “We do not read that Paul was heard by Jews anywhere so quietly and with such forbearance as he was when he first came to Ephesus. For while others raised an uproar and drove him out, he was asked by them to stay longer. Now, after he has tried for three months to set up the kingdom of God among them, the ungodliness and stubbornness of many reveals itself. For Luke says that they were hardened. And the heavenly doctrine has this particular power, that it either turns the reprobate into a fury or makes them more obstinate; and it does so not because of its own nature but accidentally, as people say, because, when the truth presses hard on them, their hidden venom breaks out.” Quoted in Chung-Kim et al., eds., *Acts*, RCS, 267.

⁵⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 601: “This is either a lecture hall or a school building, as the term σχολὴ (*scholē*) indicates... Tyrannus would likely be the owner or teacher.”

⁵⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 401: “The Western text adds to v. 9 that Paul taught there between the fifth and the tenth hour, i.e., between eleven a.m. and four p.m. This is altogether plausible since these hours would constitute the heat of the day when most Asians took an extensive siesta. The hall would likely have been vacant at such a time, and Paul would have taken a break from his own trade during this period (cf. 20:34).”

⁵⁸ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 402: “First Corinthians was written from Ephesus, and during this period Paul seems to have made a brief, unpleasant visit to Corinth to deal with the troubles in that congregation (2 Cor 2:1) ... This was also the period during which Paul began to organize his collection for Jerusalem (cf. 1 Cor 16:1–4).”

⁵⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 794: “The gospel reached the entire province. Luke does not specify how this took place, e.g., by Paul’s preaching or through missionary associates such as Epaphras who proclaimed the gospel in the Lycus Valley (in the region of the Upper Maeander River) in Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colossae (Col 1:3–8; 4:13). In his letter to the Christians in Corinth, Paul conveys greetings from ‘the churches in the province of Asia’ (αἱ ἐκκλησίαι τῆς Ασίας), a reference which implies that several congregations in the province were evidently established during this period.”

⁶⁰ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 794: “Paul had a large number of coworkers during his mission to Ephesus: Aquila and Priscilla (*Acts* 18:24–26), Timothy (1 Cor 16:10), Epaphras (Col 1:3–8; 4:13) and Philemon (Phlm 1–2) from Colossae, Aristarchus from Macedonia (*Acts* 19:29; 20:4; 27:2; Phlm 23), Gaius from Corinth (*Acts* 19:29), Tychicus and Trophimus (*Acts* 20:4; Col 4:7), perhaps also Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus from Corinth (1 Cor 16:17).”

⁶¹ Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 783.

⁶² Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT, 794: “Luke’s statement that all people in the entire province of Asia heard the gospel is unique: we do not find a corresponding claim regarding Paul’s ministry in the provinces of Cilicia, Syria, Galatia, Pamphylia, Macedonia, or Achaia. The singularity of the statement not only suggests its historical veracity but also underlines the fact that this period was perhaps the most

Revelation: Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. This probably also included Colossae, which was only about 100 miles from Ephesus. Paul later wrote the letter of **Colossians** to the church that formed there.⁶³

And it wasn't just Jews or just Gentiles, either. According to Luke, it was "both Jews and Greeks."

¹¹ And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, ¹² 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.⁶⁴

So we dealt with this a little bit with the Apostle Peter. God used Peter to do incredible miracles like this. Peter's shadow was even healing people (**Acts 5:15**). And now the same kinds of things are happening with Paul.⁶⁵

By the way, I believe that God used these extraordinary miracles to *authenticate* the preaching of the gospel and to *accelerate* the message throughout the ancient world.⁶⁶ Even in the way that these miracles are described, you can see that what's happening is unusual. It's an outworking of Paul's apostolic power.⁶⁷ Luke even calls these miracles, "extraordinary." Miracles are already extraordinary, right? But these, even as far as miracles go, are unusually extraordinary.⁶⁸

Can God do miracles like that in our day? Sure, he can. Does he normally? No. I don't think so. Not that I've seen anyway. So if you get a letter in the mail with a prayer handkerchief and a money envelope, you have my permission to tear that up and throw it in the trash.⁶⁹

Remember, I've said this before, but let me say this again. We want to "**experience the apostles' teaching, not teach the apostles' experience!**" I don't think what's happening here with Paul is normative or prescriptive for us. It was unusual. It was extraordinary.

And watch what happens next in **verse 13**.

¹³ 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."⁷⁰

Alright, here's where things get really sad. Luke tells us that there was a group of Jewish exorcists, not Christians by the way, who watched what Paul did and said to themselves, "**Cool, I want to do that too.**"⁷¹

fruitful period of Paul's missionary ministry. Paul informs the Corinthian Christians in a letter written during this period that God has opened 'a great door for effective work' (1 Cor 16:8–9)."

⁶³ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 401: "Luke said that the witness in the hall of Tyrannus continued for a period of two years. When this is added to the initial three months in the synagogue plus the 'little longer' of v. 22, one arrives at the three years or so Paul later gave as the length of his Ephesian ministry (20:31)."

⁶⁴ MacArthur, *Acts*, vol 2, MNTC, 175: "As a doctor, Luke carefully distinguishes between diseases and afflictions caused by evil spirits to make clear that not all illness stems from demonic causes."

⁶⁵ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 602–3: "This summary of Paul's miraculous work sounds like the summaries in the Gospels about Jesus (Luke 4:40–41; Mark 5:27–34; 6:56) and a summary in Acts about Peter (Acts 5:15). Such encounters with magic have been part of several scenes in Acts (5:16; 8:7; 16:16–18)."

⁶⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 402: "This practice often strikes the modern mind as too close to the relic worship that plagued the medieval church. It is, however, present in other New Testament miracle traditions—the healing hem of Jesus' garment (Mark 5:27–34; 6:56) and the healing shadow of Peter (Acts 5:15). Perhaps it is to be viewed as God's accommodation to the mind-set of the people of that age. In any event, the miracles wrought by the apostles are never presented as ends in themselves but always as opportunities, assistance to faith and commitment. That is true in the present instance. The power of God manifest in Paul's miracles ultimately led to the Ephesians' overcoming their magic and superstition (cf. 19:17–20)."

⁶⁷ In 2 Corinthians 12:12 Paul states, "The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works."

⁶⁸ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 401: "Luke described these as being 'extraordinary,' which is something of an understatement."

⁶⁹ Sproul, *Acts*, 329: "Today there are charlatans on Christian television who appeal for funds and tell viewers that if they send in money, they will receive a blessed handkerchief and power from the Holy Spirit and healing. I heard a televangelist tell viewers that if they would just send him sixty dollars, he could guarantee that God would pour out a blessing upon them. If they would double the amount of their gift, he could guarantee a double portion of this blessing. It is tragic the way people take the truth and power of God and turn it into a sideshow."

⁷⁰ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 603: "Their effort shows the syncretism present in Ephesus. There is irony here: they do not believe Paul's gospel, yet they seek to tap into his power."

⁷¹ CHRYSOSTOM: "There may be someone among you who, on hearing this, wishes he were in possession of this power, so that the demons should not be able to look him in the face, and he considers those holy men fortunate because they had such power. But let

And so these guys try to use the name of Jesus like it's some kind of "Hocus-Pocus" or "Abracadabra" incantation. And they try to do what Paul did. In the words of Al Mohler they wanted "a Jesus you can use, rather than a Jesus who will save."⁷²

I told you a few weeks ago that in the Roman Empire there were these Jewish magicians that would travel around and do this kind of stuff. You might remember that guy Elymas Bar-Jesus in **Acts 13**. He was a Jewish magician like these guys.

And **verse 14** says,

¹⁴ Seven sons of a Jewish high priest⁷³ named Sceva were doing this. ¹⁵ But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know,⁷⁴ and Paul I recognize, but who are you?"⁷⁵ ¹⁶ 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.

This isn't a Holy Spirit beatdown. This is an evil spirit beatdown.⁷⁶ **These guys got slain in the spirit—an evil spirit!** And they were so afraid of this demoniac, that they ran away naked and wounded.⁷⁷

By the way public nakedness was very shameful for Jews.⁷⁸ Even to be seen in only your loincloth would have been mortifying for a Jew. So it's a testament to how terrified they were by this evil spirit, that they would run out in public naked. These guys were terrified.

Look at **verse 17**.

¹⁷ 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.

I find it interesting here that the name of Jesus was extolled. Because you might think that this story would call into question the power of Jesus's name. It doesn't. People fear the name of Jesus even more than they fear those evil spirits.⁷⁹

¹⁸ Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. ¹⁹ And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all.⁸⁰

him listen to Christ, who says, 'Do not rejoice because the demons are subject to you.' He knew that all people especially rejoice in this because of vainglory. For if you seek what pleases God and what is for the common good, another road is greater. For to free people from a demon is not so great as to rescue them from sin." Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 238.

⁷² Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 97. Mohler's fuller quote includes additional applicational takeaways: "Like the sons of Sceva, many in our own day similarly call upon Jesus without really knowing him. All around us are people ready to call upon the Lord Jesus but do not want the gospel. They are ready to call upon a sweet Jesus who will be their constant companion and spiritual talisman, but they are not interested in knowing Jesus as the incarnate Son of God. They want a Jesus they can use, not a Jesus who saves."

⁷³ Fruchtenbaum, *The Book of Acts*, 403–4: "This chief priest was corrupted and had perverted Judaism in Ephesus. He now lived far from Jerusalem, for he would not be allowed to practice these things in Jerusalem."

⁷⁴ DIDYMUS THE BLIND: "It is no paradox if the evil spirit says to the Jewish exorcists, 'I know Jesus' and the following, just as other demons used to say, with a loud cry, to Jesus himself, 'I know who you are, the Holy One of God.' To these you can add the passage, 'even demons believe and they tremble,' for it provides no evidence that evil spirits have faith accounted as righteousness." Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 238.

⁷⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 404: "As so often with the exorcisms performed by Jesus, the demon *confessed* Jesus and even acknowledged that the power of Jesus worked through Paul. He was, however, not about to yield any turf to these seven."

⁷⁶ CHRYSOSTOM: "One may justly wonder at this point why the demon did not cooperate with the exorcists' deception but refuted them completely and exposed their stage act. It seems to me that he was very angry, just as if he were someone in the gravest danger, who is being refuted by a pitiful wretch and wants to vent all his rage against him." Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 237.

⁷⁷ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 94: "We must be careful in our day not to become too 'sophisticated' to believe in the existence of evil spirits. When we do, we become too 'sophisticated' for the worldview of the early church, of Paul and the apostles—and of Jesus Christ."

⁷⁸ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 96: "For a Jewish man, and still more for seven sons of a high priest, being naked before others was far worse than being wounded. To be naked was to be exposed in your emptiness, idolatry, and impotence of faith. To be stripped naked was to be shamed and humiliated in the highest form."

⁷⁹ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 97: "Our job as believers is not to try to become known to the demons as exorcists or because of our extraordinary powers. Our task is to make sure we are known in hell because of our faithful and bold preaching of God's word."

⁸⁰ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 403: "A number of magical papyri from the ancient world have been discovered. These consist of various spells that often invoke the names of foreign gods and employ various kinds of gibberish. In the Paris collection of magical papyri, various Old Testament terms are found, such as Iao (for Yahweh), Abraham, and Sabaoth, terms which would have sounded exotic to Greeks and Romans. One spell reads, 'I abjure thee by Jesus, the God of the Hebrews.' Another from the same papyrus reads, 'Hail, God of Abraham, hail, God of Isaac, hail, God of Jacob, Jesus Chrestus, Holy Spirit, Son of the Father.' Ancient magicians were syncretists

Ephesus was known at this time for its “spirituality.”⁸¹ It was a place where charms and amulets and sorcery and other types of occultism were common.⁸² And so this episode with the seven sons of Sceva scared these believers straight. And they got together and burned all of their remnants of the occult. **Maybe some of you, Christian friends, need to do something similar this afternoon! Just have a little bonfire and burn some that evil stuff.**

And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver.⁸³

My goodness, that’s a lot of dough! That’s more than you even realize! That’s the equivalent of 50,000 days’ worth of wage for a person in the first century. That’s 137 years’ worth of wage for the average worker at this time.⁸⁴ We’re talking thousands, maybe even millions of dollars’ worth of books in today’s world that they burned.

Let me tell you what’s going on here. This group of people decided that Jesus is awesome and this demonic stuff stinks. They decided, “**Jesus is awesome, and we don’t need this stuff anymore.**” This is real spirituality right here. This is real faith in action. This isn’t the feigning of spirituality; this is real spiritual vitality that is borne out of faith in Christ.⁸⁵

Here’s what I think happened. The Holy Spirit started to bring conviction on these Ephesian Christians.⁸⁶ And they started to feel remorse over their books of magic and their amulets.⁸⁷

And here’s the thing. When the Holy Spirit gets a hold of you... when you get a taste of that new life in Christ... nothing competes with that. Nothing in this world satisfies like that. And the silly trinkets and trivialities of this world are nothing more than fuel for a fire.

and would borrow terms from any religion that sounded sufficiently strange to be deemed effective. These Jewish exorcists of Ephesus were only plying their trade. Paul’s ‘spell’ in Jesus’ name seemed effective for him, so they gave it a try.”

⁸¹ Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Kindle Edition, chapter 30: “Ephesus was the waterhole for every kind of magician, witch, clairvoyant, and criminal. Con artists, murderers, and perverts all found the climate of Ephesus unusually agreeable. That city was the Dark Castle of Asia Minor.”

⁸² Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 405: “Ephesus was reputed as a center for magic. The famous statue of Artemis, the centerpiece of her temple, was noted for the mysterious terms engraved on the crown, girdle, and feet of the image. Referred to as the ‘Ephesian scripts,’ this magical gibberish was considered to have great power. It was not by accident that Paul’s encounter with magic took place in Ephesus, nor is it a surprise that his converts there had been involved in such practices. Magic was part of Ephesian culture.”

⁸³ Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, 404–5: “Two lessons emerge from the story. For one, Christianity has nothing to do with magic. The name of Jesus is no magical incantation. The power of Jesus drives out the demonic, and his Spirit only works through those who, like Paul, confess him and are committed to him. Second, the demon did confess the power of Jesus over him, ‘Jesus I know.’ Compare Jas 2:19, ‘Even the demons believe and shudder.’ The people of Ephesus recognized this and extolled the powerful name of Jesus as a result (v. 17). What was true for them is still true. In the name of Jesus is all the power needed to drive out the demonic forces in every age.”

⁸⁴ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 605: “If the silver refers to denarii, then fifty thousand of them would equal a single worker’s wages for 137 years without a day off, since a denarius was an average worker’s wage for a day.”

⁸⁵ EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA: “It shows what our Savior’s disciples were; it shows the extraordinary influence of their words when they addressed their audience, that people so touched the depths of their souls, caught hold of and pierced the individual conscience, that men no longer hid anything away in concealment but brought forth their forbidden things to light and themselves completed the indictment of themselves and their own former wickedness. It shows what their pupils were like, how pure and honorable in disposition, determined that nothing evil in them should lurk below the surface, and how boldly they prided themselves on their change from the worse to the better. Yes, they who gave their magic books to the flames and voted for their complete destruction left no one in any doubt that they would never again have anything to do with sorcery, and from that day forth they were pure from the slightest suspicion of it.” Quoted in Martin and Smith, eds., *Acts*, ACCS, 240.

⁸⁶ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 604–5: “They did not appreciate this when they initially responded to Jesus, but now they see it. So they did not give up the practice first and then become Christians. Rather, in their maturing walk with God, they came to renounce the practice, no doubt through the spiritual guidance and enablement that the gift of the Spirit brought. These believers are described through the use of a perfect-tense participle here ($\tauῶν πεπιστευκότων$, *tōn pepisteukotōn*, those who have believed), highlighting the enduring nature of their faith.”

⁸⁷ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 96: “The Holy Spirit convicted many believers of their idolatry and syncretism—mixing magical arts with devotion to Christ. They came confessing and bringing their paraphernalia of witchcraft and divination to be burned (v 18–19).”

When Christ gets a hold of your life, you're willing to dispossess yourself of everything in order to gain more of Christ.⁸⁸ That's what living by the Spirit looks like. Paul said in **Philippians**, “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” (3:8). **That's what these Ephesians are experiencing here. Have you experienced that before?**

And look how the Lord responded to their action.

²⁰ So the word⁸⁹ of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.⁹⁰

Amen and Hallelujah. May God do that same thing in San Antonio, Texas.

Now let me close on this note. I made this statement at the beginning of this message. Let me say it again: **You either have the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit, or you have the life-threatening powerlessness that comes from his absence.** Let me say that again. **You either have today the life-giving power of the Holy Spirit or you have the life-threatening powerlessness that comes when the Holy Spirit is absent.** Which is it for you? Do you have the Holy Spirit inside of you or not? Do you the power of the Holy Spirit flowing through you or not?

When I look at this passage in **Acts 18 and 19**, I see one unifying theme—the power of the Holy Spirit. You either have it or you don't. Paul had it. The seven sons of Sceva didn't. Priscilla and Aquila had it, Apollos didn't. Not at first. And what did those twelve John the Baptist disciples say to Paul when he asked him if they had received the Holy Spirit? “We didn't know there even was a Holy Spirit.” Well that's unfortunate. And Paul's like, “let me tell you about him.”

You either have the Holy Spirit or you don't. You either have salvation or you don't. You are either saved by the blood of Jesus or you are unsaved. You either have faith in Christ leading to eternal life or you have faithlessness leading to eternal death. Which is it?

If the answer to that question is faithlessness leading to eternal death, or if your answer to that question is “I don't know, Tony,” I want you invite you right now to confess your sins and receive Jesus Christ as your Savior and receive the power of the Holy Spirit.

⁸⁸²⁵ Mohler, *Acts 13–28 for You*, 96: “Here in Ephesus, Luke provides a demonstration of the nature of true repentance. It is a repentance that is both costly and public. Turning to Christ necessitates a decisive repudiation of the rule of all others in order to come under the unmatched and supreme lordship of Jesus Christ.”

⁸⁹ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Expanded Digital Edition, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 799: “The ‘word’ (ο λόγος; see on 4:29) is the word of God, i.e., the proclamation of the good news of Jesus as Israel's Messiah and Savior of humankind.”

⁹⁰ Bock, *Acts*, BECNT, 605: “The allusion to power (κράτος, *kratos*) [ESV: ‘mighty’] here is no accident, given the battle with magic.”