

Day 7 : Acts 20:13-38 – Ephesian Elders (2)

Prayerfully read: Revelation 2:1-7

Understanding

Paul warned of 2 dangers to the church at Ephesus:

- False teachers would come in from outside to ruin them (v29)
- False teachers would arise from within, serving their own desires for followers and status (v30)

There was only one remedy – to constantly watch. Particular responsibility for this was placed in the hands of the elders. And it was not Paul who did this – it was God the Holy Spirit (v28). But even their own careful watching would not be enough – they needed the oversight of God and his gracious word (v32).

How did the church at Ephesus do? Within a few years (maybe only a decade), Christ acknowledged it as hard-working and sound, having carefully exposed and rejected false teachers – but warned them that they had lost their first love to him, and were in danger of having him remove himself from them (Rev. 2:1-7).

Doctrines (Teachings)

- Churches may pay very close attention to their teaching – whether it is Biblical and true. False teaching is the danger to churches identified more often than any other in the New Testament. The church which takes a relaxed attitude to what is taught is a church that is heading for ruin, if it has not arrived there already.
- When a church is careful and concerned over what it teaches, there is an opposite danger – of becoming unloving. The truth is vital because without it people cannot be saved and built up as Christians – but to be saved and built up as Christians means that we learn to love God and to love one another. Sound teaching that does not lead to more and more love is teaching that has forgotten its very purpose for existing!

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- Am I growing in my knowledge of sound doctrine?
- Am I growing in my love to the Lord Jesus? To my fellow believers? What does this passage have to say about these things?

The Acts Of The Apostles

Daily Bible Reading Notes

Week 13 (Chapter 19:1-20:38)

Grace Church Belper

<http://www.gracebelper.org.uk>

(For previous weeks' notes, visit
<http://www.gracebelper.org.uk/readingnotes.php>)

Day 1 : Acts 19:1-10 – Paul at Ephesus

Prayerfully read (above and): Ephesians 1

Understanding

Ephesus was the main city on the eastern side of the Aegean Sea – in modern Turkey. Paul had been there a little time in Acts 18, but had had to go to Jerusalem. Now, he has returned as he promised (18:21), having come by land, now on his third missionary journey.

In Ephesus, Paul found a group who, like Apollos, were converted, being believers in the Jewish Messiah through the preaching of John the Baptist – yet somehow they had not yet heard that Jesus of Nazareth was this promised Messiah, crucified, resurrected and ascended. They seem though to have known less that Apollos, who was instructed concerning Jesus (v25).

Upon discovering them, Paul quizzed them as to their understanding and then preached the parts of the gospel which they had not yet heard – which they gladly received. They were baptised, and the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were given to them (v6) – just as had happened when the gospel had first advanced in Jerusalem (ch. 2), Samaria (ch. 8) and to the Gentiles (ch. 10): constituting them as a new gospel church – the first in Asia. Luke is showing us again that Paul was in no way inferior to the other apostles – and how the gospel in its advance “to the ends of the earth” met those in all kinds of situations.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- There are people who are converted yet whose understanding of many things is extremely vague. We must not be quick to condemn others as definitely unsaved because their understanding seems ropery. Many of the Lord's people are very weak and need to be treated very tenderly. Nevertheless, as such people are more consistently exposed to sound and full gospel preaching, their true condition will show itself as they either respond to it or reject it.
- In the Bible, the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit were particularly given when the gospel made significant advances into new regions – not at any and all times.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- Is my understanding of the Bible and of the great “plan” of the gospel improving? Am I using the opportunity that God gives me, or am I being lazy? What am I hazy on, and what can be done to improve?

Day 6 : Acts 20:13-38 – The Ephesian Elders

Prayerfully read: Ephesians 6

Understanding

Verses 13-16 record the journey to Miletus (about 60km south of Ephesus). From there, Paul called the elders from the church in Ephesus to give them a final word of encouragement and exhortation, expecting never to see them again (v38).

Paul began his speech by drawing attention to what he had done whilst in Ephesus and the region of Asia (the Roman province within modern Turkey – not to be confused with the modern name for the continent!). Then he spoke of what he anticipated in the future: going to Jerusalem, but expecting (because the Spirit had revealed it) great hardship at every stage. He then moved on to exhort the elders to follow his example, and to beware of those who would ruin the church.

Verse 28 is especially noteworthy – Paul says that God purchased the church with his own blood: a clear testimony to the deity of Christ.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- The aim of missionary work is to establish new, self-sufficient churches which do not depend forever upon outside help but which govern themselves, with their own elders and teachers using the word of God. Paul preached the gospel, gathered believers, visited to encourage, appointed elders, and then finally committed the work completely into their hands. Anything less than this falls short of New Testament missionary work.
- A gospel minister must aim to teach all of God's word, to everyone (v20-21). And he must not only teach soundly, but must be a personal example in his own life in everything – so that at the end of his service, like Paul, he can hold up himself as an example of the things he has taught. Of course, this is something for every Christian to aim for - hypocrisy is a great disgrace to the Lord.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- Is your life an example? Could you appeal to others to your own life as proof of your seriousness and sincerity when you speak of the gospel?
- Do you shed tears (v19) over the lost? Paul did – like his master (Matthew 23:37ff). I expect that very few of us can say that our compassion for the lost is like theirs. Let us seek God's help!

Day 5 : Acts 20:1-12 – Greece and Troas

Prayerfully read: Ephesians 5

Understanding

Paul left Ephesus to go to Macedonia and Achaia as he had previously planned (19v21). Whilst in Ephesus he had written to the church at Corinth – 1 Corinthians. But many problems with that church remained. The letters written at that time reveal too that his purpose in visiting was to collect an offering for the impoverished Jewish believers in Jerusalem. Whilst in Corinth, Paul was encouraged by the response of the church there to his letter. He also wrote the letter to the Romans whilst there. Then he returned through Macedonia again, collecting the fellow-workers listed in verse 4. These men are mentioned in various of the letters of Paul from the time. At Philippi, Luke rejoined Paul (note the change to “we” in v6) – having been there since Acts 16.

They waited for seven days at Troas – presumably so that they might spend one Lord's Day with the believers there. However, as Paul preached his message was very long (v7) and one young man was lulled into sleep by the effects of the lamps whose burning reduced the oxygen supply (v8). He fell from his seat in the window, and those who went down found him dead. However, Paul like Elijah and Elisha before him (1 Kings 17:17-24, 2 Kings 4:33-36) raised him with an embrace – a miracle which brought great encouragement to the church of God's power to sustain them (v12).

Doctrines (Teachings)

- Christians should make efforts to find and enjoy the company of other Christians – especially to have fellowship with them. And wherever possible, we should make sure that whether at home or away from home we spend time with Christians on the Lord's Day.
- The power which works in the church is the same power which raised Jesus from the dead – so the church can never die, as long as it remains in Christ (Ephesians 1:19-20).

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- What can you do to encourage and enjoy fellowship with some of your fellow believers? Can you use your home more? Is there someone you could ring for a chat or pop in to see?
- How should this passage change our thinking and behaviour in reference to God's power and his good intentions for his church?

Day 2 : Acts 19:8-20 – Ephesus, Continued

Prayerfully read: Ephesus 2

Understanding

In Ephesus, Paul followed his normal habit – he preached in the synagogue. This went on for three months, but again some resisted and became antagonistic. This forced Paul to withdraw. Instead of teaching in the synagogue, he taught in a place owned by a man called Tyrannus (v9) – for two years. During this time, many from across the region heard the gospel.

The theme of verse 11 onwards is the power of Christ and his superiority over false gods and paganism. Miracles were performed through Paul, like Peter before him (5:15) through even the barest contact (v11-12).

Evil spirits too were banished in the name of Jesus. Some Jewish exorcists, seeing the power of Jesus' name, sought to use it themselves too – as if it were a magic charm that they could tap in to. But they soon learnt that this name was even greater than they thought – not one that could be manipulated in this way. Indeed the evil spirits trembled at the name of Christ and knew that Paul was Christ's herald – but the protection and benefits of Christ only belong to those who have bowed to him in the gospel. When the people of Ephesus understood this, the name of Christ was lifted up even higher in their thinking – unlike their pagan gods, Christ could not be manipulated (v17).

Doctrines (Teachings)

- The mere name of Christ, or Christian influences or blessings (having Christian parents, belonging to a church, knowing the Bible, etcetera) is not enough. The Lord will not forgive our sins merely because we have been influenced in some way by Christianity. The only way of salvation is to repent and trust in the Lord Jesus – not as a magical name, but as a living and personal Lord and Saviour.
- The power of Jesus Christ is greater than every other power in the universe (Matthew 28:18). He is able, as and when he pleases, to cause all opposition to him and to his kingdom to be completely destroyed.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- How do you think of Jesus Christ? Is Christianity just a matter of going through the motions and hoping that it'll bring you some blessing? Or do you have a personal and daily relationship with and knowledge of him?
- Do you believe in Christ's power to advance the gospel?

Day 3 : Acts 19:8-22 – Ephesus, Continued

Prayerfully read: Ephesians 3

Understanding

Yesterday we saw how the Lord Jesus showed his superior power in Ephesus, in healings and castings out of evil spirits, and in what happened to seven Jewish exorcists who tried to use his name as if it were a magical power which they could control.

Seeing that the name of Jesus was not this kind of name, but rather a holy and true one led many who believed to see how wrong their previous practice of occult magic had been. In response, they collected together their text books and burnt them (v19) – openly. But first, they took a count of how much value the burnt books had – and it came to 50,000 silver drachmas: a very great amount of money.

Luke's comment is one we have heard before – his great concern is not even the marvellous story of Paul's travels, but instead how the gospel spread. He wrote, “So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed”. As people heard what the Christians had done and how serious they were about following Christ, the Lord was glorified and even more people believed.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- When we trust in Christ, we must make a radical break with sin. Some things are always sinful, and must be stopped completely and immediately. The Ephesians did not pray about their magic, or ask God for help to get rid of it: rather, they immediately burnt all the magic books they had even though there was a great financial loss to themselves. They did this publicly – because when we have been involved in public sin, then our repentance ought to be known publicly too. We must do this no matter how costly or difficult it is – this is the true repentance which the Lord recognises and blesses (v20).
- No Christian should ever have anything at all to do with anything occult – mediums, clairvoyants, tarot cards, horoscopes, etc. (Deut. 18:10-14).

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- Have you repented of sin? What does this mean? What has your repentance cost you? Are you still repenting day by day?
- Are there sins which you know you could and should break off immediately, “burning the books” associated with them?

Day 4 : Acts 19:23-41 – The Riot At Ephesus

Prayerfully read: Ephesians 4

Understanding

Ephesus hosted the Temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Worshippers from all around the empire would come for an annual festival – and purchase souvenirs, including silver souvenirs for their shrines at home.

The gospel, though, was having such an effect that one of the silversmiths, Demetrius, perceived that his trade was in danger. Demetrius stirred up his fellow workmen, first appealing to their covetousness (their love of money), and then to their religious pride (alleging that Diana's honour was endangered) (v27). Having stirred up his companions into a frenzy, they then went out into the city and soon gathered a chanting mob.

The city clerk was the highest authority in the city – answerable to the regional proconsul. If the city could not be kept under control, then it was in danger of losing its status in the empire as a free city. He pointed out that there the riot was probably illegal, and that if there were charges to be brought against anyone then they should be brought properly. Doing so, he succeeded in dispersing the mob.

Luke's purpose in reporting this event is the same as before – to show that the great disturbances that went with the preaching of the gospel were not caused by Paul, but by the enemies of the gospel; and that these disturbances were completely without legal merit.

Doctrines (Teachings)

- Love of money is a root of many kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:10); even zeal for religion can be brought into its service. But covetousness is forbidden by God, and a sin which will ruin us.
- Christians are not people who should be found causing great disturbances in society. If they are faithful, then such disturbances will often come as people oppose the gospel – but they should never come because of Christians bringing them.

Applying (Make sure that you are detailed and specific!)

- What do you desire more than you desire God? What can be done about it?