

SAFEGUARDING THE GOSPEL

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

As its missionary efforts continued, the church sought to protect its doctrine and demonstrate the power of the gospel through righteous living so that others might trust in Christ.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Acts 18–19

+ **SETTING:**

As the early church continued to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, they encountered various challenges. News of the Jerusalem Council was only one part of the message that needed to be heard; some disciples had not yet heard all of the information and did not understand how God's redeeming work came about. As a result, the church had to encourage godly leaders in the full understanding of the gospel, correct those who were in ignorance and error, and promote godly living.

DAY 1

READ:

Acts 18:24-26

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 18:26

NOTES

It is never easy to be corrected. It can be a shameful or embarrassing moment when you are shown that your thinking or beliefs are inaccurate or inadequate. It is easy to critique someone else, but it is harder to receive that correction. As Proverbs 15:1 says, a gentle answer turns away anger. When someone shows themselves to be skilled and knowledgeable, but having a gap in their information, how should we respond?

Priscilla and Aquila give us a beautiful model of Christian charity. Rather than publicly challenging Apollos's teaching, shaming him, or being perceived to be challenging the gospel message in front of unbelieving Jews, they pulled him aside and explained to him the way of God with greater precision and accuracy.

Instead of letting our emotions cause us to be defensive, we ought to be people who respond well to instruction, being able to give and receive critique. When we are shown information that would help us to be more accurate and effective, we grow in the wisdom of God's saving plan and more effective in our ability to communicate it well.

How have you received correction that has been effective in changing your perspective?

DAY 2

READ:

Acts 19:1-3

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 19:1-3

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"What is preaching? Logic on fire! Eloquent reason! Are these contradictions? Of course they are not. Reason concerning this Truth ought to be mightily eloquent, as you see it in the case of the Apostle Paul and others. It is theology on fire. And a theology which does not take fire, I maintain, is a defective theology; or at least the man's understanding of it is defective. Preaching is theology coming through a man who is on fire."¹

—D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
(1899–1981)

What is your response when asked a well-worded question? Most of the time, a good inquiry opens up room for dialogue. Words begin to flow, ideas come out, thoughts are clarified, and suddenly there is more understanding.

Often we approach evangelism by giving a simple presentation and expecting an immediate response. While it is true that we are called to proclaim the gospel, we forget that we are dealing with people who have real life struggles, honest questions, deep doubts, and deeply rooted skepticism that keep them from coming to faith in Christ. Like Jesus, Paul often asked questions when he engaged people he did not know. He probed to understand what they meant. He asked questions to clarify. And then he spoke the word of the gospel with precision into their confusion, chaos, and criticisms.

What might happen if we approached people with a sense of curiosity? How might people open up to us and allow us in to those places where darkness has gripped them? A good word at the right time is like apples of gold (Proverbs 25:11), and it may be the opportunity for us to bring the message of salvation with great skill and precision.

What questions might you ask to unbelievers in order to open doors to discuss faith in Jesus Christ?

DAY 3

READ:

Acts 19:11-19

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 19:19

NOTES

When many people come to faith in Christ, their response sometimes seems quite radical to long-time believers. Inappropriate books, music, posters, or other items might be destroyed by the new believer. In this way, a new believer is acting consistently with their confession that they are turning from sin to Christ.

It might seem dramatic when someone changes their wardrobe, leaves a job, stops selling items that were sinful, or changing their business practices all of a sudden. Instead of being concerned about these dramatic actions, we ought to rejoice that the gospel is prevailing in people's lives and be encouraged that they want to follow Christ above all else.

When Jesus becomes our everything, all of the things of this world pale in comparison. We can leave everything else and follow Him because we know He is our greatest treasure. When you have the most valuable thing in the entire universe, letting go of a job, wardrobe, reputation, and other material items won't seem like a sacrifice at all. Living in a godly way is of greater importance.

What is something you need to give up as you follow Jesus Christ?

DAY 4

READ:

Ephesians 3:20-21

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Ephesians 3:20-21

NOTES

The city of Ephesus was the center for many practices and activities of the occult. Sorcery was commonly practiced there, with magic and spells and formulas used on a daily basis. When the believers turned from their evil ways and trusted in Christ, they got rid of their former way of life. Their former practices were no longer consistent and compatible with faith in Jesus Christ. As a result, they publicly burned costly sorcery texts.

The apostle Paul would later encourage the believers in Ephesus to continue in these ways. By confessing their sins, the power of darkness had been defeated, and the power of Christ was on display. For these reasons, Paul could say that God's glory was on display in the church. When the gospel prevails and defeats the power of sin, the resurrection power of Christ is on display in the lives of His church, creating a compelling witness to the watching world.

How have you seen God's power at work in your church this past week?

DAY 5

READ:

Acts 19:18-20

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Acts 19:20

NOTES



KEY DOCTRINE #8:

PRESERVATION OF SCRIPTURE

God has chosen to reveal Himself to humanity through the text of Scripture, having inspired it and directed it to be free from error. God has also acted providentially throughout the course of history to ensure the biblical text is faithfully preserved for future generations. Our belief in the preservation of Scripture is supported by investigation into how the canon of Scripture was formed and how manuscripts were faithfully transmitted throughout the centuries.

How do you change the culture around you? Christians have debated these measures. Should we seek to enact Christian laws? Should we be politically engaged and bring our Christian values to the public square? While these questions are complicated and require much thought and wisdom, the clear evidence from the early church was that they focused on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As Paul proclaimed the gospel in Ephesus, people believed the Word of the Lord. The gospel spread and increased in power. The favor of the Lord brought about the blessing of many people being saved. The result was dramatic.

Because of the conversions in Ephesus, silversmiths faced a sudden drop in business. Those who made idols suddenly lost repeat customers. As a result, they protested the effects of the gospel. People's businesses were impacted because of others' conversions.

The gospel spread widely and increased in power. And being the Word of God, it will last for all time. The gospel will often bring the kingdom of this world into a collision course with the kingdom of God. Christians need wisdom on how to handle these challenges, especially when the spread of the gospel affects the livelihood of those who are resistant to it. Many in opposition to the gospel might be confused or fearful, even upset. But we can trust that the gospel is the power of God for salvation that brings about good for the world.

In what ways have you experienced the power of God's Word in your life?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"Scripture is the Word of God that has completely entered into the world. . . . To the degree that humankind becomes larger, life becomes shorter, the memory weaker, science more extensive, error more serious, and deception more brazen, the necessity of Holy Scripture increases."²

—Herman Bavinck (1854–1921)

POINT 1: The church stands behind godly leadership (Acts 18:24-28).

Apollos was a faithful and bold witness to the person and work of Jesus Christ, but he needed greater clarity.

? How should we distinguish between false teaching and ignorance?

With gentle instruction from other believers, Apollos became more effective in his teaching and witness for Christ.

? How can we grow in our effectiveness in proclaiming Christ?

POINT 2: The church contends for correct doctrine (Acts 19:1-7).

Though we encounter believers around us, we discern their spiritual maturity by asking questions and desiring that they know truth.

? What methods can we use to help people discern their spiritual state?

In truth and love, we correct doctrine when needed and build up the body for further ministry.

? What can you do to be a part of building up the body for further ministry?

POINT 3: The church prevails through righteous living (Acts 19:18-20).

When we understand that all sources of wisdom or help books are inferior to Scripture, the Word of God can continue to spread.



What other types of wisdom do people turn to today that are inferior to Scripture?

KEY DOCTRINE #8: PRESERVATION OF SCRIPTURE

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From Day 5: In what ways have you experienced the power of God's Word in your life?

MY RESPONSE

Because Christ endured rejection, suffering, and death to bring about our salvation, we persevere in sharing the gospel with others while praying that they too will trust in Jesus and experience transformation.

- **HEAD:** How can you grow in asking good questions of people to encourage discussions about Christ?
- **HEART:** What changes have you seen in your life that cause you to hope in God's power to change you?
- **HANDS:** Who is someone who has grown in faith that you can encourage?



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VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"This voluntary confession was evidence of repentance and fear. No one who is not deeply moved will lay himself open to people's reproaches and will accept judgment on earth in order to be acquitted in heaven."³

—J. I. Packer (1926–2020)