

ACTS
Assaulting the Kingdom of Darkness
Acts 19:8-20

Each year in October America celebrates Halloween. For most Americans, Halloween is just another fun time, but its origins are quite pagan. When people dress up like witches, ghosts, demons and Satan, they probably have no idea they are propagating the occult which had its beginnings hundreds of years before Christ. Halloween goes back to the practice of the ancient Druids in Britain, France and Germany. This celebration honored one of their deities, Samhain, lord of the Dead. Samhain called back all wicked souls from the dead on a certain day during the fall of the year in order to celebrate death. This day honored the god of the dead and the wicked spirits of the dead. The Druids believed that on this particular night the souls of the wicked dead returned to their former homes to be entertained by the living. If acceptable food and shelter were not provided, these evil spirits would cast spells, cause havoc and terror, and haunt and torment the living. They demanded to be appeased. These evil spirits demanded a “treat.” If they did not get it, they then “tricked” the living.

For most Americans, Halloween is just a fun day, but for people in the occult, it is the most powerful day of any given year. Halloween intensifies the contacting of the dead, seances, black magic and various activities of the occult which are as old as man himself and can be traced to Babylon in the ancient world. So let us remember that when we dress up like witches, ghosts and demons, we are either consciously or unconsciously participating in the worship of the dead and dabbling in the occult.

Ephesus was a city held in the grip of superstition, demonism and darkness. In fact, Ephesus was the citadel of Satan, the fort of the underworld and the bastion of the occult. Commercially, Ephesus was a very wealthy city, for it sat at the crossroads of the Roman Empire. Religiously, Ephesus was famous for the Temple of Diana or Artemis. Diana was the goddess of the earth and she was the goddess who controlled the sexual reproductive powers of men and women. Therefore, the worship of Diana was very sex oriented. This magnificent Temple of Diana was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Diana's temple had 127 columns, towering 60 feet high. The length of the temple was 425 feet and the breadth 220 feet. The ritual of the temple services consisted of sacrifices and of ceremonial prostitution. Spiritually, Ephesus was the center of witchcraft, demonism, the black arts, astrology and occult practices of all kinds. This city was sold out to superstition and was enthralled with Satan and his devices. It was not uncommon to find priests, magicians, witches, warlocks and quacks of every description in this city. Ephesus was enslaved to Satan, in bondage to the occult, devoutly religious, devoted to wanton sex and sold out to materialism. Spiritual and demonic darkness engulfed this whole city of Ephesus.

Ephesus became famous for the “Ephesian Letters” or “Ephesian Inscriptions.” These were little slips of papyrus (paper) which were sold for a high price. On these pieces of paper were enchantments, incantations or spells which would enable one to ward off evil spirits. These letters would be put in charms, amulets and talismans and worn on some part of the human body by the superstitious people.

Yet it was to this sex-crazed, Satan-controlled, super-religious city that Paul came on his third missionary journey to preach the liberating gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel was successful and many in Ephesus and the surrounding provinces were won to Christ. Christ used a few Christians to make an impact on a whole city because they stopped operating on the spiritual power of Satan and began to operate on the spiritual power of Jesus Christ. Paul explained to the Ephesian Christians that they were in a spiritual warfare with the forces of darkness.

“Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world-forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:10-12).

From Ephesus Paul wrote his letters to the Corinthians and clearly pointed out that our weapons are spiritual, not carnal, as Christians. “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses” (II Cor. 10:4). Ephesus was a stronghold of darkness which could only be overcome by Christ's spiritual weapons, and no arm of the flesh could defeat Satan.

Today in this message we want to see how we as Christians are to assault the kingdom of darkness which is all around us.

ASSAULTING THE DARKNESS OF UNBELIEF - Acts 19:8-10

Speaking Boldly (19:8)

“And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking boldly for three months, . . .” -- Paul, as was his custom, spoke the gospel to the Jews first. These Jews were not involved in the occult but they were just as controlled by Satan as those Gentiles in Ephesus who bowed their wills to the devil. Satan's ace in the hole is always religion, for he seeks to blind many by religion, good works, tradition, ritual and culture.

“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (II Cor. 4:3, 4).

In fact, all men are children of the devil if they do not believe in Christ.

“You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father . . .” (Jn. 8:44).

“By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious; anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother” (1 Jn. 3:10).

Satan has spiritually blinded all men to the truth of Jesus Christ. Men may be educated, display culture, perform good works, be respectable citizens, but they are still spiritually blinded by Satan and are controlled in their philosophy by the god of this world. Religious respectability is the toughest nut to crack in all the Satanic kingdom of evil. It is difficult to get religious people to admit their bankruptcy before God and turn to Christ as a condemned sinner.

“Reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.” -- When Paul preached to these unsaved Jews, he spoke about the kingdom of God over against the kingdom of Satan. God has a spiritual kingdom that can only be entered through the spiritual new birth which comes from God. The kingdom of God belongs to the King, Jesus Christ, and all who have accepted Him as Savior, Lord and King belong to the kingdom of God. Those in God's kingdom are transferred out of the kingdom of darkness. “For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col. 1:13). Only Christ can break Satan's grip on an unsaved man.

Separating from Apostasy (19:9)

“But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples. . . .” -- As Paul preached the gospel of the kingdom of God, those who listened had three reactions: some were hardened to the truth, some believed and some had not made up their minds. When the gospel is preached men will either respond to Christ or harden their hearts even more to the truth. Those Jews who rejected and became hardened also became quite vocal and violently opposed to the Way (the Christian Faith). When the truth made no impression upon them, then Paul separated, declaring those unbelieving Jews left in the synagogue as apostates.

This raises the whole question of when does one separate from a denomination or church? Separation is

necessary when an organization goes liberal in theology and will no longer listen to the truth. Paul's example gives three principles to apply before leaving a local church or denomination. First, Paul stayed in the synagogue and evangelized for Christ until the Jews became violent in their opposition. Second, when Paul could no longer stay in the synagogue because it was affecting his attitude and the lives of other Christians, he withdrew. Third, Paul did not wait for the synagogue to expel him, but separated himself and the Christians from apostasy or false teaching. Notice Paul did not separate himself over traditions, ritual, opinions, philosophy of ministry, petty differences, but over doctrinal error and opposition to the truth of Jesus Christ as revealed to him by Christ Himself.

“Reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.” -- Paul separated himself and the true believers and probably rented the school of Tyrannus. We know nothing about Tyrannus except that he was probably a free lance teacher of philosophy who had his own school. He may have been sympathetic with Christianity because he rented the school to Christians.

The Western Manuscript adds the words, “From the fifth to the tenth hour.” Paul and his disciples rented the School of Tyrannus from 11:00 o'clock in the morning to 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon. Why? In the ancient world, the working hours were from about 7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m., and then they took a five hour break for a siesta and leisure time. Work resumed after 4:00 p.m. and continued until about 10:00 p.m. The point is that Paul and his Christian disciples gave up precious sleeping time and relaxation time to meet, study the Word and witness to anyone who wanted to hear about Jesus Christ. Notice that they were willing to sacrifice time to further the kingdom of Christ.

Spreading the Word (19:10)

“And this took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.” -- Due to Paul's teaching all in Asia Minor heard the gospel of Christ. Of course, Paul did not reach all of Asia Minor himself. He won men to Christ and trained them in his Christian school (seminary) in Ephesus, and these men in turn went out to preach the gospel everywhere. These trained men formed local churches. It was during this time that the church at Colossi was begun by Epaphras and Philemon, who carried the gospel up the Lycus Valley into the cities there. Others, like Trophimus and Tychius, were involved in preaching to other cities of the region. This was probably the time the seven churches in the Book of Revelation were founded -- Smyrna, Sardis, Thyratira, Pergamus, Philadelphia and Laodicea. Paul operated on the principle of training men to do the work of the ministry. “And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also” (II Tim. 2:2).

All totaled, Paul probably stayed about three years in Ephesus. He did so because there was much Satanic opposition to Christ, but he also needed time to train men who could assault the darkness of unbelief in that region.

ASSAULTING THE DARKNESS OF SUPERSTITION - Acts 19:11, 12

Special Miracles (19:11)

“And God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, . . .” -- The Ephesians were very superstitious and deeply involved in the occult. Satan and demons had performed many miracles in that city, so God now had to perform special miracles through Paul. They were unusual miracles performed to authenticate Paul's message of Christ.

Sicknesses Healed (19:12)

“So that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out.” -- Apparently most, if not all, of the diseases that Christ healed through Paul were due to Satanic influence. Satan can and does bring sickness. Not all sickness is Satanic but some is and this kind of sickness can be healed. The unusualness about these miracles was that handkerchiefs (sweat rags placed around the head) and aprons (rag cloth aprons placed around the waist) were taken from Paul and when these were

touched by the sick, they were healed because the evil spirits came out of them. These, of course, were spectacular miracles and caused the people to talk about the power of Christ.

Paul had the spiritual gift of miracles which includes the ability to raise the dead. It is my belief that no one today has the gift of healing or miracles. If I could see someone raised from the dead, or even be immediately healed as they were in the first century, then I might change my opinion on this matter. God does heal today but He heals through prayer. Healing miracles do take place today but there are no faith-healers.

Many so-called faith-healers today have people send in for a specially blessed and anointed handkerchief for a sum of money and promise a healing. This present-day practice is superstition, hocus-pocus and is a perversion of the teaching here in Acts 19:12.

ASSAULTING THE DARKNESS OF DEMONS - Acts 19:13-17

Speaking Jesus' Name by Exorcists (19:13, 14)

“But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, ‘I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches.’ And the seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this.” -- These seven sons were either sons of a father who was an apostate Jew who had given himself over to the occult and now claimed to be a priest in the order of Diana, or he was a Jewish high priest who was so corrupted that he and his sons were exorcists. The Jews had learned the ways of the occult when they were in Babylon. Some Jewish exorcists claimed to have secret formulas passed down from Solomon. An exorcist is a person who seeks to cast out evil spirits from people who are possessed by them. These seven sons apparently saw Paul cast out demons in the name of Christ and thought that they too would cast out demons in Christ's name. This was a real testimony to the power of Christ since normally the exorcists would use incantations, spells or charms in the casting out of evil spirits.

These exorcists were playing around with the name of Christ and with the occult. We have many today who dabble in the occult, calling themselves fortune tellers, swamis, yogis, gurus and mediums. These people are to be avoided by all Christians.

“There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things, is detestable to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God will drive them out before you” (Deut. 18:10-12).

Apparently they came to a demon possessed man and said, “I adjure (command) you by Jesus whom Paul preaches to come out.” They attempted to cast out this demon in the name of Christ. They received a funny and strange response from this demon possessed man.

Scorn of the Demon Towards the Exorcists (19:15)

“And the evil spirit answered and said to them, ‘I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?’” -- The demon in the man spoke words of disdain, indignation and contempt to the seven exorcists. What happened is rather humorous. The demon answered, “I instinctively and innately recognize Jesus, and I am acquainted with Paul, but who are you? You don't have any power over me!”

The demons knew Paul. He was famous in the spiritual underworld and even in hell. Paul was much talked about in the pit. The demons trembled when they saw Paul preaching the gospel. He was a threat to the kingdom of darkness because he was armed with the power of Christ.

Frank Barker, pastor of Briarwood Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama comments on this verse by saying,

But, as Christians, are our names known in hell? As Christians, when we move about, does it cause reverberations in the kingdom of darkness? Do they say something to this effect, “Oh, no! John Jones is working at that place of employment we've held captive for so long. His going there is a dangerous situation for us, because he verbalizes his faith boldly. He shares his faith in Jesus Christ. He prays. He seeks to win others to Jesus. He stands up for the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Subduing of the Exorcists by the Demon (19:16)

“And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued both of them so that they fled out of the house naked and wounded.” -- One of the manifestations of demon possession is extraordinary physical strength. The demon possessed man took out after the seven single handedly, routed them, tore off their clothes, and they jumped out of doors and windows and ran through the town as streakers.

What does this teach us? It is only a Christian using the name of Christ in the power of Christ who can cast out a demon. No human power, even using the name of Christ, can dislodge a demon. Furthermore, we still have the seven sons of Sceva with us today who are trying to change men but they have different names. You can call them “philosophy” or “psychology” or “sociology” or “communism” or “education” or “science” or even “religion.” You can call them different names but not one of them has the power to change the heart of man or deliver him from slavery to Satan. Only Christ can change people’s lives and give them a spiritual dimension.

Sanctifying of the Name of Jesus (19:17)

“And this became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified.” -- This incident, because of the humor involved, became known all over Ephesus and both Jews and Greeks heard about it. It became known that Jesus Christ was more powerful in the spiritual realm than demons. Christ had more power in the invisible world than Satan. Christ's name was sanctified and magnified in the minds of men. A good dose of fear fell upon Ephesus, but it did not stop with non-Christians only. A realization of Christ's power in the spiritual realm brought wayward and disinterested Christians to a new dedication.

ASSAULTING THE DARKNESS OF CHRISTIAN APATHY - Acts 19:18-20

Severe Confession (19:18)

“Many of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices.” -- Apparently, this refers to Christians who began to confess their sins and come to grips with their superstitions which they had been secretly holding on to since their conversion to Christ. They were undoubtedly new converts who had never given much thought to the evilness of these practices. They were visibly shaken by the supernaturalism of Christ and began to clean up their lives, divulge their hidden practices and confess openly what they were doing privately. As young Christians, they still held on to some of their old ways, but God brought real conviction to their souls. They stopped fooling around with astrology, horoscopes and the influence of the stars which had been bringing them defeat and disillusionment in their Christian lives. Some of the Christians, although they had been converted to Christianity for some time, still had books on magic in their homes and still were, in some ways, in complicity with the occult. By their confession, the church was purified, for no Christian is to have any connection with the forces of darkness. “And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them” (Eph.5:11). These Christians brought their secret sin into the light. This was the beginning of true revival in the church at Ephesus.

What sins, Christian, are you still holding on to from your unsaved life? Does the demon of pride, materialism, pleasure, procrastination, sex, alcohol, drugs, criticism and gossip plague you? Have you fully turned over these kinds of practices to the Lordship of Christ? When you received Christ, you said you would follow Him as Lord. Now you must consistently bow to His Lordship so your life can change. You will never have power in your life until you come to grips with secret practices that you have carried over from your unsaved life.

Seeking to Evidence True Repentance (19:19)

“And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of all; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.” -- Christians, old and new, brought their books of magic, their charms, amulets and talismans with Ephesian Inscriptions, and their papers of white and black arts and piled them up and burned them. They did not sell them for a profit or give them away but burned them. The amount of these things was the equivalent of around \$10,000.00 today which was a considerable sum of money in that day. Their confession led to conflagration, indicating the reality of their repentance. If confession is real, it will lead to renunciation of sins. These Ephesian Christians were changing the total pattern of their lives because they saw they could no longer dabble in the occult and be a Christian too. They were no longer “playing church.” They meant business. They sacrificed. They paid a price. They denied self.

What about you Christian? Are you ready to confess your sins and put a fire to books, records, dresses, TV programs, bathing suits, excessive materialism, excessive use of time for pleasure and other worldly and evil practices which sap the power of Christ from you? Are there things that need to be confessed, repented of, and thrown into the fire? When you begin to deal severely with your life, then you will experience the power of Christ and revival. Is Christ really lord in your experience? Are you just playing church?

Success of the Word (19:20)

“So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.” -- As Christians became serious about Christ, confessing their sins and spreading the gospel, the Word of God had great success.

Why don't we experience more power in our lives as Christians? We have the Bible, we have Christ in our life and we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as did the first century Christians. Why don't we see more power? Christ works through dedicated serious and committed Christians. When we get serious, Christ will get serious.

CONCLUSION

Saved. Are you progressing in your spiritual life? If not, do you know why not? It is because you have not started a fire? Burn those wrong things in your life. Burn those secret sins. Stop compromising with your sins and rationalizing away your evil practices. Light a match to open sin and secret rebellion. Stop excusing and pampering your sin, and then you shall experience the power of Christ.

Unsaved. Are you a non-Christian? The Bible says you are a child of the devil. You may be respectable, educated, cultured and even religious, but if you have not bowed your will to Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior, you are controlled by the god of this world -- Satan. You cannot deliver yourself from the control of Satan. Only Christ can deliver you out of Satan's kingdom into the kingdom of God. He will deliver you the moment you turn to Christ in true faith and repentance. Expel the forces of darkness! Believe in Christ Jesus the Lord!