

**7/31/16**

**Acts 19: 1-7**

## **Normal Christianity**

*19 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples <sup>2</sup> and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” <sup>3</sup> So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?” “John’s baptism,” they replied. <sup>4</sup> Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” <sup>5</sup> On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup> When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. <sup>7</sup> There were about twelve men in all.*

*(Pastor Prays)*

Normal Christianity is radical, distinctive and upsetting. It's sacrificial and bold. It loves with extravagance, weeps with those who hurt and seeps into every fiber of who you are.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is famous for saying, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him to come and die.” It’s what Christ followers do. We die to self and we die to the world and we die to greed and lust and hate and ambition. We learn to love Christ above all things and other people more than we do ourselves.

Being a Christian makes you generous and merciful – quick to forgive and slow to become angry. The Holy Spirit awakens us, convicts us so that we apologize when we are wrong and do it without equivocation. A born-again Christian hates racism, classism and hypocrisy. She helps the weak, prays for the lost and loves to worship. The

prevailing trait of a Christian is not his looks or talent or his athletic ability or political influence. The prevailing trait of a Christian is his godliness, a godliness that stains like red paint that you can't wash off.

In short, when you are called a Christian, when you are called a disciple, it should be obvious from the word "go." And in the text, Paul runs up on 12 guys in Ephesus who, although identified as disciples, clearly are not Christians, and Paul knew it. And in an unexpected way, this passage opens up a reality that haunts the local Bible-believing church.

It's a tragedy that frightens every pastor worth his salt: There are multitudes of people in church who are not Christian in the New Testament sense of the word. It's what Paul found in Ephesus. Honest and obedient men, sincere and faithful men, these men had even been baptized. They were seeking to be religious but something was clearly missing. Paul addresses it immediately, giving us the irreducible element of normative or normal Christianity.

## **Normal Christianity Should Be Easy to See**

Today, I would like to do things a little differently. I'd like to walk through the passage, commenting on some things. Then I will give you a few elements of what J.W. Stott calls Normative Christianity. *(Pastor reads through the scripture text with explanation)*

Real Christianity should be easy to see. What are the elements? Here is the first one.

### **Faith in Jesus**

- Perfect Life – So he would have a righteousness to give us. We have an alien or imputed righteousness from Christ.

- Perfect Preaching – Sermon on the Mount
- Perfect Substitution – Takes our place on the cross
- Perfect Resurrection – Not like Lazarus, he died again. Jesus’ resurrection is a victorious declaration of His perfect life, death and resurrection
- Perfect Ascension – Bodily
- Perfect Intercession – Pleads on our behalf
- Perfect Lordship – Absolute sovereignty over the universe

There are two kinds of faith in Jesus.

- a. Saving faith – I just talked about that
- b. Sustaining faith – Faith in Jesus sustains and anchors you. It puts a foundation under you so you don’t sink and lifts the ceiling above you so you have hope. We fix our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. Jesus, who --for the joy set before Him-- endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

As Paul spoke to the men that thought they were disciples, he told them to believe in the one John the Baptist pointed to – Jesus.

Normal Christianity is faith in Jesus. A saving faith and a sustaining faith.

Another element Paul brings to their attention is something John the Baptist preached as well.

## **Repentance of Sin**

Not a popular word, but a necessary one altogether. Notice what Paul says in v. 2-4.

*and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”<sup>3</sup> So Paul asked, “Then what baptism did you receive?” “John’s baptism,” they replied. <sup>4</sup> Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.”*

If you believe what John said, then you need to repent of your sins and believe in Christ. Repentance is a forgotten element of Evangelical Christianity. It's been censored out in an effort to make us more popular and likeable. Preachers are afraid to tell you to repent, afraid you might not return. But without repentance for sin there's no admission of sin, no realization of guilt and no need for a Savior.

There are two kinds of repentance for a Christian.

- a. Initial Repentance – when you come to the realization that you are a sinner and have sinned against and offended a holy God and are under a sentence of cosmic condemnation. Paul says in Ephesians, you are children of wrath and when you see the depth of your sin and the kindness of God shown in Christ, you turn away from and reject your former life and yield to the lordship of Christ. Normal Christianity has initial repentance. John Owen says “Be killing sin or it will be killing you.”
- b. Daily Repentance – This is why we preach the Gospel to ourselves daily. Now, as children of God, changed from sinners to saints, we confess our need daily for the blood of Christ to cleanse us from the day's sin. Daily repentance means fellowship.

### **Being Filled with the Spirit**

This is where some denominations come off the rails, using this passage to prove some kind of strange salvation.

But notice the question in v. 1-2. *While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples<sup>2</sup> and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”*

By Paul's question, you see that the assumption is that to believe in Christ is to be filled with the Holy Spirit, because if they don't have the living Spirit, they don't have Jesus.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:3 *Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit.*

You will also notice in the passage when Paul heard they didn't have the Holy Spirit, he preached Jesus. Through the preaching of Christ, the Spirit awakens our dead hearts to believe, and that is being filled with the Spirit. And throughout our lives, by the power of God's word, we are not only saved, we are sanctified – made more like Christ – inside and out.

In the text, Paul laid hands on them in fellowship and the Ephesian Pentecost happened. Just like in Acts 2 with the Jews, and the Samaritans through Philip and the Gentiles through Peter. Speaking in tongues and prophesying were signs in the beginning that displayed the Spirit's activity that moved off-scene as the New Testament was completed. Paul will even say in 1 Corinthians 12:30 *Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?* Indicating that it was not a universal sign. But those men were now born *again* by the power of the Holy Spirit.

There is one more piece of Normal Christianity.

### **Christian Baptism**

In the text, the 12 men are baptized as part of Normal Christianity. Please hear me say that being baptized did not save them. It's not a requirement of Salvation. Think of baptism like this: Three ways – 1. Act of Obedience. 2. A clear act of Identification. It symbolizes the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. 3. A genuine Proclamation of the Gospel of being born again by the life, death and resurrection of Christ.

There is the Gospel of Normal Christianity – Faith in Jesus, Repentance of sin, being filled with the Spirit, and Christian Baptism.

*(Pastor shares the Gospel message and prays)*