

Abounding Grace Christian Church

The Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Church – Part 59

I. Exposition of Chapter Nineteen (Continued).

A. Verses 11-12 - **“Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.”**

1. The word **“unusual”** is sometimes translated as **“extraordinary.”** Even though the laying on of hands for people to receive healing is something for all believers to practice (**Mark 16:18**), the use of **“handkerchiefs or aprons”** to use as **“prayer clothes”** for healing and deliverance is not necessarily a practice for all believers. This type of thing is only mentioned this one time as something that was particular to Paul’s ministry. This is not to say that God can’t use **“prayer cloths”**, but a person should be directed by the Holy Spirit to do this and not just assume it’s to be a common practice. The following comments from the Fire Bible add another important point:

“Any minister today who attempts to gain recognition or financial support by advertising handkerchiefs for healing is not acting according to Paul’s motive and spirit. Paul did not use these items to gain money or show off spiritual power. The Holy Spirit chose to work through Paul and these items in a miraculous way to give people’s faith in Christ a point of contact. This allowed Paul to minister healing to more people than he could personally and physically touch.”¹

2. To help us get a better idea as to what was happening here, Bible scholar F.F. Bruce offers the following:

“Paul’s ministry in Ephesus was marked by manifestations of divine power, especially in healing and exorcism. The use of pieces of material which had been in contact with Paul for the healing of the sick is reminiscent of the healing of those who touched the fringe of Jesus’ cloak (Mark 5:27–34; 6:56). One may also detect a parallel here to the healing effect of Peter’s shadow in 5:15. The pieces of material were presumably those which Paul used in his tentmaking or leather-working—the sweat rags for tying around his head and the aprons for tying around his waist. No intrinsic healing efficacy is ascribed to these things; the healing efficacy lay in the powerful name of Jesus.”²

B. Verses 13-16 – Jewish sorcerers Shamed and Defeated.

1. Verse 13 – **“Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits saying, ‘We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.’”**

a. The word **“itinerant”** means; **“to move about from place to place, with significant changes in direction—‘to travel about, to wander about.’”³**

b. The word **“exorcists”** means; **“one who drives out evil spirits, usually by invoking supernatural persons or powers or by the use of magic formulas”⁴**

2. Grant Osborne gives us insight pertaining to the culture and magic in Ephesus:

“Ephesus was a center for magic in the ancient world, and there is a deliberate contrast between Paul’s miracles in verses 11–12 and the magic tricks of sorcerers in this section. In 13:6–11 we read of Paul’s conflict with the Jewish court astrologer and sorcerer Elymas Bar-Jesus, and I noted that many such came out of Judea and Samaria due to their preoccupation with angels and heavenly powers. Moreover, magic was a source of entertainment back then just like philosophers and other soapbox speakers, so groups of them would band together and go town to town performing tricks and ‘driving out evil spirits.’ They were the Houdinis of their day.”⁵

3. Verses 14-16 – The Seven Sons of Sceva.

a. Verse 14 – **“Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest who did so.”** Now Luke mentions seven individuals specifically who attempted to cast out demons in the name of Jesus. Dr. Stanley Horton makes an important point concerning this:

“These seven were sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest’ (one of the chief priests

¹*Fire Bible: English Standard Version*, Donald C. Stamps, Gen. Ed. (Springfield, MO: Life Publishers Int’l, 2011), 1854.

²F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of Acts*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1988), 422.

³Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 184.

⁴*Ibid.* 545.

⁵Grant R. Osborne, *Acts: Verse by Verse*, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 345.

associated with Annas and Caiaphas in Jerusalem). Possibly following the example of other Jewish exorcists, they took it upon themselves ‘to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus’ in a sort of formula: ‘I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches’ (v. 13, NASB). But they had no right to do this. To use the name of Jesus means to identify yourself with Him and His Word and to put yourself at His disposal for Him to do His will. No unbeliever can do this.”⁶

b. Another way of saying this is, unless you have a living, vital relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, you cannot use His authority by invoking His Name. Authority comes through relationship! The deeper your relationship with Him, the greater your authority in His Name!

c. Verse 15 – “**And the evil spirit answered and said, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?’**” – In other words, the evil spirit did not recognize these men as ones having authority over him. It’s interesting that the two words translated “**know**” are two different Greek words. Stanley Toussaint writes:

“Some significance may be attached to the variation in the verbs for ‘know’ used here by the evil spirit (i.e., the demon). He said, Jesus I know (*ginōsko*, ‘to know by interaction and experience’), and he added, Paul I know about (*epistamai*, ‘to know about, to understand’). But the demon did not know Sceva’s sons.”⁷

d. Verse 16 – “**Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.**” – This shows that a demon possessing a person can cause that person to have superhuman strength. The demon in the man was able to use the man’s physical body, causing the seven to be “**overpowered**” and “**prevailed against.**” They ended up being wounded and stripped naked, running from the house. They were utterly humiliated because they tried to be something they weren’t.

C. Verses 17-20 – **The Name of Jesus is Glorified and the Word grew and prevailed.**

1. Verse 17- “**This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.**”

a. One thing this showed people was that Jesus Christ is more powerful than any kind of “magic” that was commonly practiced in Ephesus.

b. This caused both Jews and Greeks to “**fear**” God. This seems to carry the idea of both being afraid of the all-powerful God and being in awe of Him due to His power being seen.

c. “**...the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.**” – Regarding this, Grant Osborne writes:

“In all that had transpired, ‘the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor,’ meaning that he was not only shown to be powerful but was also proved to be the Lord of his creation. It is likely that ‘Jesus was held in high honor’ (or “glorified”) means that numerous conversions occurred as a result of this incident. If he had power and control over the demonic realm, he would also be sovereign over his creation as well and salvation is to be found in him. His lordship had been proved to be total, ‘Lord of all.’ This becomes another summary passage showing how crises and opposition often stimulate the power of the gospel and its witnesses, resulting in many conversions (2:41; 6:7; 9:31, 42).”⁸

2. Verses 18-19 – “**And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver.**”

a. This shows that the “**...many who had believed...**” really did repent of their sins. This shows a genuine turning to the Lord and turning their backs on their sin and old life. Stanley Horton writes:

“All this had an important effect on the believers also. They began to see that the holy name of Jesus demands a holy people. Many of them came and ‘openly confessed,’ publicly reporting, their ‘evil deeds’ (including the attempts to cast magic spells to control people). The Greek indicates they now turned from their sin, with a total commitment to the Lord. They realized their need for righteousness as well as for salvation.”⁹

3. Verse 20 – “**So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.**” – Again, we see that no matter what the opposition, faith in the power of God’s Word and the Name of Jesus will always bring victory.

⁶Stanley M. Horton, *Acts: A Logion Press Commentary* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2001), 323.

⁷Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 410.

⁸Osborne, *Acts: Verse by Verse*, 347.

⁹Horton, 324.

“The cleansed church became a powerful and growing church. (The spreading of God’s Word is also mentioned in 6:7; 12:24; 13:49.) With this sixth ‘progress report’ Luke brought another section of his book to a conclusion (cf. 2:47; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24; 16:5; 28:30–31).”¹⁰

¹⁰Toussaint, “Acts,” 411.