

Acts: Seeing the Spirit at Work
Sunday Morning Bible Study
Lesson Fourteen – Acts 18-19
Good News Strategy

As we watch Paul travel and proclaim the good news of Christ, we see a pattern that he follows when he enters each city. It is no different in Corinth and Ephesus. His first attempt is to persuade the Jews concerning Jesus. He begins in the synagogue where they meet, study Scripture and pray. But when the Jews reject his message he turns to the Gentiles. In both cities Paul's bold step of going to the Gentiles was vindicated by many people hearing and believing the gospel.

A well-thought-through strategy is vital if we are to engage the world with the message that can change it.

OPEN

- How does the idea of having a strategy for evangelism strike you?

STUDY

1. *Read Acts 18:1-18.* What do you learn about Paul in 18:1-4?

We learn here that Paul was a tentmaker by trade, and he used that trade to support himself and the ministry.

2. What drastic action did Paul take when the Jews resisted his message this time (18:6-7)?

“...he shook out his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’” (v. 6). We see Paul move from Jews to Gentiles, actually by walking next door. He had tried to proclaim Christ to the Jews and they rejected the message. So, their blood was on their own heads, not on Paul's head.

What are the consequences (vv. 8-10, 12-15)?

Crispus (leader of synagogue) and his household believed, many of the Corinthians believed and were baptized. As a result there is conflict. Paul is brought before the tribunal and almost assaulted, but the Lord protects him.

3. If you were Paul, how would you have felt when you received Jesus' message in verses 9-10?

I would have felt comforted, but maybe a bit anxious based on my former experiences with angry crowds.

How did Paul respond?

He stayed for a year and a half, teaching the word of God among the Corinthians.

Summary: This message is couched in the language used by God himself in the Old Testament when addressing his servants. Both the prohibition "Do not be afraid" and the promise "I am with you" were repeatedly given. Now Jesus said the same things to Paul. He was to continue witnessing fortified by the presence and the protection of Christ, and by the assurance that Christ had in Corinth "many people." They had not yet believed in him, but they would do so, because already according to his purpose they belonged to him.

This conviction is the greatest of all encouragements to an evangelist. Strengthened by it, Paul stayed for a year and a half in Corinth, teaching them from the word of God (18:11). For the word of God is the divinely appointed means by which people come to put their trust in Christ and so identify themselves as his.

Read Acts 18:18-28. Paul left Corinth accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila and went to Ephesus, left Priscilla and Aquila there and continued to travel throughout the area where he had gone on one of his first missionary journeys. His purpose was to strengthen the disciples.

4. What do you learn about Apollos in 18:24-28?

He was a Jewish believer, Alexandrian, eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He taught concerning Jesus but had not learned of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He learned from Priscilla and Aquila and powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

5. How is Aquila and Priscilla's response to him an example to us?

Apollos knew a lot, but had a few things wrong. Priscilla and Aquila didn't reprimand or degrade him. They responded in love, teaching him that which he lacked in knowledge. Then, they supported him as he taught in public. We should do the same to new or young believers. There was a time when we ourselves did not know what we do know now.

6. *Read Acts 19:1-22.* As you look through these verses, what good fruit do you see from Paul's ministry in Ephesus?

The disciples at Ephesus received the Holy Spirit, all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks, the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled, many believers confessed their magical practices, burned their books, the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

7. What opposition did Paul encounter?

Some people in the synagogues spoke evil of the Way, the evil spirit that opposed the sons of Sceva would also have been at work opposing Paul's preaching of Christ

8. *Read Acts 19:23-41.* What were the stated reasons and the real reason for the opposition (19:23-34)?

The stated reason was to protect the temple and worship of Artemis, but the real reason was to protect their business of making idols.

9. What is the significance of the fact that this is the second time (first in Corinth and now in Ephesus) that the Roman law protected Paul in his ministry?

It gives further proof for the fact that Roman law did not oppose Christianity. Christianity was perfectly legal and did not seek to upset Roman life. What's interesting is that eventually Paul would be martyred under Roman law.

Summary: Luke wanted to show that Rome had no case against Christianity in general or Paul in particular. In Corinth the proconsul Gallio had refused even to hear the Jews' charge. In Ephesus the town clerk implied that the opposition was purely emotional and that the Christians, being innocent, had nothing to fear from duly constituted legal processes. Thus the impartiality of Gallio, the friendship of Asiarchs and the cool reasonableness of the city clerk combined to give the gospel freedom to continue on its victorious course.

10. In spite of the obvious cultural differences between first-century cities in the Roman Empire and the great urban complexes of today, there are also similarities. What lessons can we learn from Paul's ministry in Corinth and Ephesus about the how, the where and the when of urban evangelism?

Reason with people, in the places they gather, whenever they gather there.

Summary: When we contrast much contemporary evangelism with Paul's its shallowness is immediately shown up. Our evangelism tends to be focused on simply inviting people to church. Paul also took the gospel out into the secular world. Our evangelism appeals to the emotions for a decision without an adequate basis of understanding. Paul taught, reasoned and tried to persuade. Our evangelism is superficial, making brief encounters and expecting quick results. Paul stayed in Corinth and Ephesus for five years, faithfully sowing gospel seed and in due time reaping a harvest.

APPLY

- The term *tentmaker* comes from the fact that Paul worked as a tentmaker on his second missionary journey. What are reasons for tentmakers in modern missions?

How does this story of Paul at Corinth and Ephesus challenge you to become a more effective proclaimer of the gospel?

PRAY

- Thank the Lord Jesus that he will help you grow as a messenger of his truth.

All material taken from:
John Stott, *Acts: Seeing the Spirit at Work*. Downers Grove, IL: IV Press, USA, 1998.