

The Pitfalls of Zeal – Acts 18:24-19:41

Acts 18:24. The Apostle Paul (**Map, ESV Study Bible, 2126**) has just begun his third missionary journey, starting in Antioch once again, traveling through Galatia . . . And now stopping for a time in Ephesus. (**Outline**)

And what we find here is a series of events with a common theme: zeal gone awry. People who were zealous, but misinformed; zealous, but mistaken. Exposing the *pitfalls* of zeal, so that we can avoid them ourselves.

Not that we should avoid *zeal*. Zeal is one of the reasons Jesus died. *To purify for himself a people . . . zealous for good works* (Titus 2:14). That's what it says. But zeal without boundaries is dangerous.

Like the over-zealous person who rushes into something without counting the cost. It's a pitfall. Or the know-it-all who's high on passion and low on information. Or the demagogue who whips people into a mindless frenzy. Zeal without boundaries leads to pitfalls. And this passage exposes them, that we might avoid them. Take a look. V24.

➤ [24] Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria (**Map, ESV Study Bible, 2126**), came to Ephesus. (Alexandria was located in northern Egypt, and was known for its religious and intellectual influence. So it's no surprise that . . .) *He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures.* (He knew them, and could preach them.) [25] *He had been instructed in the way of the Lord* (God's work of redemption over the centuries, leading to Jesus).*****

And being fervent in spirit (zealous), *he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John.*

He knew *some* things about Jesus, but not all. Certainly not his command to be baptized in his *name*. (Mt 28:19)

He only knew about the baptism that John the *Baptist* taught. A baptism demonstrating repentance of sins and belief in the *coming* Messiah.

Whereas *our* baptism reflects repentance and belief in the *present* Messiah. Identifying us with Jesus, once and for all. Apollos didn't know about that.

[26] *He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately* (the whole Gospel). [27] *And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers* (the church in Ephesus) *encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, [28] for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.*

The first pitfall of zeal is a lack of knowledge. Because it leads to error.

Zeal without knowledge leads to error – keep _____ (18:24-28)

Error that can lead people astray. Like someone who tries to teach the Bible without really knowing it. It tends to lead people astray.

Or at the very least, leaves them wanting. Like the people in Ephesus with Apollos.

They weren't pointed in the *wrong* direction necessarily, they just weren't given enough information to make the journey; to be *fully* identified with Jesus. (Like half a map.)

Either way, zeal without knowledge leads to error.

The solution to which, is to . . .

• **Keep learning**

Keep reading, keep studying, keep growing in your knowledge of God's *Word*. So that *you* don't fall into error, and neither do those you teach; or influence. Like your kids. And keep learning by listening; to those who *do* have knowledge; like Apollos listened to Priscilla and Aquila. Because zeal without knowledge leads to error. (**Summary**)

➤ [1] *And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples* (some learners and followers; people who knew *about* Jesus, but didn't know Jesus as we'll see). [2] *And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."*

[3] *And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?"* (Into what or whose influence were you brought under?) *They said, "Into John's baptism."* (Just like Apollos. They had *repented* of their sin, but hadn't embraced God's Son. Not explicitly.) [4] *And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus."* [In other words, when he arrives, you have to profess your belief in him. Short of which, you're not saved.]

[5] *On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.* (They were immersed in water to symbolize their immersion in Jesus; their belief and salvation.) [6] *And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues* [unintelligible syllables] *and prophesying* [telling the truths of God and applying them to the situation at hand]. [7] *There were about twelve men in all.*

Laying on of hands is simply a visual and symbolic way of conveying affirmation and blessing. Affirmation of their salvation, and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

And the *lag* time between the two, as well as the manifestation of tongues and prophecy, was meant to emphasize the Spirit's personal, New Covenant influence. It was one of the ways God drew attention to it.

Now, it's instantaneous. We receive the Holy Spirit the moment we're saved. Like we talked about extensively back in chapters 8 and 2.

And after *this* incident, tongues are no longer *used* as an occasional indicator of Spirit-filled salvation. They're referred to as a spiritual *gift*, but not a spiritual indicator.

Nor do the Apostles *teach* such things in the rest of the New Testament.

Which leads *us*, in our zeal to rightly *apply* God's Word, to this: we should practice what the Apostles *taught*, not teach what the Apostles *practiced*.

If what's practiced in Acts is not taught elsewhere, it's de-scriptive not pre-scriptive.

V8 – *And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. [9] But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation* (evil of the Gospel), *he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus* (some sort of meeting place). [10] *This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.*

The second pitfall, is that . . .

Zeal without the Spirit leads to death – keep _____ (19:1-10)

The Ephesian “disciples” were serious about their *religion*, zealous about *God* . . .

But they weren’t indwelt by the *Spirit*. Which means they weren’t saved. *Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him*. Isn’t saved. Rom 8:9.

And if you’re not saved, you’re still dead; dead in your trespasses and sins. And facing even more death; eternal death. No matter how zealous you are; how religious.

So whatever you do, *believe* in Jesus, and . . .

- **Keep believing**

Showing and demonstrating that you’re truly saved, truly have the Spirit, and truly have life. Eternal life. Keep believing. (**Summary**)

➤ [11] *And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, [12] so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.*

Yet another way that he opened the door for the Gospel, authenticated its power, and confirmed Paul as a legitimate messenger.

And yet another instance where we don’t teach what he practiced. Handkerchiefs are not a thing.

[13] *Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists (itinerant, meaning traveling; and exorcists referring to people who tried to cast out demons) undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “I adjure you (I command you) by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.”*

[14] *Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. [15] But the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?” [Oops] [16] And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded (harmed). [17] And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled (exalted, praised).*

[18] *Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices (their sinful practices). [19] And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver (\$6M in our day). [20] So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily. Wow.*

What a revival; an awakening. Like the great awakenings in *our* country’s past.

Where people were cut to the core about their sin, confessed it openly, and turned to the Lord. Or *back* to the Lord. Something we ought to pray for and model in *our* day.

Every day. Every week.

But with respect to zeal, the point is this:

Zeal without wisdom leads to harm – keep _____ (19:11-20)

Like the sons of Sceva suffered harm, by foolishly trying to co-opt Paul’s method and Jesus’ name. Not good.

Because God will not protect those who use his name for their own advancement, and withhold his glory for their own praise. Won’t. He’s jealous for his glory.

And the demonic realm will not *respect* those who are unprotected. Resulting in harm.

Like those who dabble in the occult – all things paranormal, mystical, and dark. And then wonder why they’re sick, downtrodden, and conflicted.

Or how about people who read dark books and play dark games, and then wonder why fear, oppression, and de-pression plagues them?

Make no mistake, zeal for the supernatural without the wisdom of God to protect you, guide you, and dissuade you – leads to harm.

Better to . . .

- **Keep discerning**

Keep seeing things with the mind of Christ, through grid of Scripture. Keep surrounding yourself with godly people. And keep alert. Watchful. Sober-minded and vigilant.

Because your adversary the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. (**Summary**)

➤ [21] *Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome.” [22] And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while. (Where he wrote 1 Corinthians.)*

[23] *About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. [24] For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis (a Roman goddess), brought no little business to the craftsmen.*

[25] *These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, “Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. [26] And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. [27] And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship.” (He appealed to their pocketbook, their religion, their vocation, and their pride.)*

[28] *When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” (Zealous.) [29] So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater (which held about 12,000 people), dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul’s companions in travel. [30] But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. [31] And even some of the Asiarchs (cultural leaders), who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater.*

[32] *Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together. [33] Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd. [34] But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” Illustrating the point, that . . .*

Zeal without restraint leads to chaos – keep _____ (19:21-34)

Confusion. Like the chaos and confusion that abounds in many charismatic and Pentecostal circles these days.

Where their zeal for miraculous manifestations of the Spirit, leads to chaos in their beliefs and practices and services. Not to mention their lives.

The solution to which, is to . . .

- **Keep abiding**

Abiding in Christ. Abiding by *his* way of living and thinking. *His* ethic. *His* word. *His* Spirit. Because while the Spirit of the Lord brings liberty . . .

He also brings restraint (2 Thess 2:7). Perfectly balanced, perfectly timed, and perfectly applied. But you have to abide.

➤ Which brings us to our last point, from v35-41. (**Summary**)

[35] *And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, “Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky? (Probably referring to a meteor.)*

[36] *Seeing then that these things cannot be denied (that Artemis and her temple are well-known and preeminent), you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. [37] For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. (They’re only talking about *their* God.)*

[38] *If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls (judges). Let them bring charges against one another. [39] But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly [not this ad hoc one]. [40] For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion.” [41] And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.*

The final pitfall of zeal, which the town clerk avoided, is that . . .

Zeal without reason leads to foolishness – keep _____ (19:35-41)

Like when you’re shopping, and all rationale goes out the door.

Or when political figures advocate ridiculous laws and extreme policies.

Or when infatuated lovers pledge their lives before they even know each other. Or have the maturity to *make* a good decision. Zeal without reason leads to foolishness.

So whatever you do, whatever situation you’re in, whatever desire you have, whatever opportunity you face . . .

- **Keep thinking**

Keep considering. Keep praying. Because zeal without reason, has a way of leading us down a path, without hope.

Like zeal for a job, that leads to a foolish move.

Or zeal for money, that leads to a foolish decision.

Better to keep thinking (**Summary**); keep abiding; keep discerning.

And be zealous *without* the pitfalls.

Pray – Father, thank you for the truths of your Word that apply to all of life. Purify our passions. Sustain our belief. Invigorate our learning. And keep us from error; keep us from foolishness; keep us from harm. For your glory and our joy.