

3/24/24 - Acts 18:23-19:10 - "Ignorance is Hell"

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[0 : 0 0] Hear these words from Acts chapter 18, starting in verse 23. We're going to be reading through chapter 19, verse 10. After spending some time there, he departed and went from one place to the next, through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.

Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John.

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, the way of God more accurately.

And when he wished to cross to Acacia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples, and he said to them, Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?

[1 : 2 5] And they said, No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit. And he said, Into what then were you baptized? They said, Into John's baptism.

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. On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. There were about twelve men in all. And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.

But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus.

This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks, says the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, indeed.

[2 : 3 2] It's great to be gathered here. This morning, Steel Valley Church, you are. Steel Valley Church gathered here today. The church is not a building. It is the people.

Where the people are, there the church will be. It's important that we don't forget that. And so we're gathered here and we open up God's word. It's no ordinary time. It's not a light time or a light duty, for that matter.

And we come for God to speak to us through his word. And I intend for that to happen by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Now, there's an idiom or phrase that describes the tendency to be more comfortably unaware of something, rather than aware of something.

To be comfortably unaware. It's called ignorance is bliss. That's the idiom, right? And in a lighthearted case or a lighthearted fashion, ignorance is bliss.

[3 : 37] If maybe you ignore your trustworthy critics in your life, where you're pretty much sold that you have a voice like Kelly Clarkson or Danny Gokey, but your neighbor in church could probably attest otherwise.

And so ignorance would be bliss. It's more encouraging to think that you actually have a talent you actually don't have. I'm not calling anyone out this morning. Maybe I am.

No, I'm not. Or ignorance is bliss when you ignore the caloric value in that chocolate cake or that piece of pie.

I mean, it's much more enjoyable to eat a 450 calorie slice of pie, not knowing how many calories are in them, right? Yes.

Amen. That might be the first amen. We're in trouble. Ignorance would be bliss if we would ignore the spider infestation under our beds, right?

[4 : 39] It's much easier to sleep at night, not knowing that 20 spiders are crawling on you as you sleep. And if statistics are true, you know, you eat eight of them a year. But that has been debunked, so you don't have to worry about that.

Son, there's your life lesson. But in more severe cases, serious cases, ignorance is not bliss if we ignore the signs that our child is not the angel that they are portrayed to be while they struggle with addiction to substances or addiction to pornography.

Ignorance is definitely not bliss if you ignore the news. That's giving all the warning signs of local gang activity, but still you like to continue and take your dog on their leisurely walk every night, carefree.

Ignorance is not bliss if you ignore the doctor's diagnosis, just telling yourself that you're in perfect health and the doctor doesn't know what they're talking about. And so in relevance to the passage today, we see that ignorance is not bliss when we ignore the clear indicators of theological error and allow things to continue with good vibes.

All the while, people believe that they are saved but actually don't know the gospel. Right? Today's passage will reinforce that there is nothing blissful about being ignorant to the gospel.

[6 : 22] Nothing blissful about that at all. And we're going to break this passage up into two sections in a sermon titled Ignorance is Hell.

Ignorance is Hell. I know it's a weighty title, but it is a weighty text. And so I do want us to pray as we dive into the activity going on between Apollos and Ephesus and then as he goes to Corinth.

And we see in chapter 19, Paul's return to Ephesus after Apollos departs and goes to Corinth and see this unfold today that there is nothing blissful about being ignorant of the gospel.

Let's pray. Father, we come to you asking for help, asking for clarity, asking for you to speak.

Help us, Lord, to hear your words today and let them transform our hearts and minds and so that our lives may be reshaped and conform to the likeness of your Son.

[7 : 33] Help us, Lord, by the power of your Holy Spirit this morning, we ask. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. And so, like I said, we're going to break this up into two separate sections and these sections will be thematic if you want to think of it that way to kind of encapsulate the theme of the verses.

And if you are new with us this morning, welcome. You'll find a Bible in each one of the chairs. You'll probably find a plethora of apps, Bible apps on your phone that you can look at.

I encourage you to keep your Bible open and also just if I could push pause on my flow right now to mention that there is a ringing on my microphone and somebody like me is not going to do well if that continues because I'm going to be paying attention to the ringing and not the Lord.

So I'll trust our media team to take care of that. So the first section is titled in a thematic overview discipling and ignorant teacher.

And we see that between Acts chapter 18 verse 24 to 28. Discipling and ignorant teacher. And so in verse 24 through 25 we meet an eloquent man.

[8 : 55] His name is Apollos. He's competent in scriptures. Don't take my word for it. Eyes to the text. He's an eloquent man competent in the scriptures.

He's fervent in spirit. He spoke and he taught the gospel accurately. It's important to realize that while Apollos was a man of great character and competency, great character and competency, he was not exempt from error.

The error was that he simply only knew the baptism of John of which pointed to Jesus Christ. An old covenant versus a new covenant.

And if that's the error that's involved with the teaching of Apollos, then he is neglecting the Holy Spirit of which signs and seals believers into the family of God in regeneration and baptism being a sign and a seal of that miraculous intervention of God in our hearts.

He's missing the fullness of the gospel. And in verse 26, we meet some bystanders. We remember those bystanders, right? Aquila and Priscilla, we saw them in the text last week and they overheard him teaching in the synagogue and last week we heard that Paul left them in Ephesus in chapter 18, verse 19 just a little bit earlier and they discovered his ignorance.

[10 : 33] They discovered his lacking even though he was fervent, even though he was competent. They discovered his ignorance and took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately, the Bible says.

In other words, they taught him Christian baptism. They taught him Christian baptism. How the triune God places his name on his people.

Baptism is a sign and a seal outwardly of what has been done inwardly by the miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit in regeneration.

You see, Christian baptism is not so much more than just, I'm sorry, Christian baptism is so much more than just repentance, like John's baptism.

It's so much more than just repentance. Repentance is part of it, but it's not all of it. It vividly illustrates and testifies to our union with Jesus Christ in his death and his resurrection.

[11 : 43] This is Christian baptism. It's the fullness of the gospel that expresses in our lives as Christians born again Christians. And now, it's worth mentioning that Priscilla and Aquila are good models of how to correct a high-capacity leader, a high-capacity teacher as well.

We live in a social media age where, unfortunately, we try to handle all of our disputes behind a keyboard. It's impersonal. It's actually unhelpful.

No disputes are ever handled online. I don't know if that's news to you, but wake up. No social media bashing was done to Apollos. No embarrassment, no public humiliation, no critical spirit.

Aquila and Priscilla are examples of how compassion and conviction materialize in the Christian life.

In other words, correction is a personal endeavor. We ought to learn that in our social media age that is so often lacking. It's a personal endeavor.

[13 : 01] And guess what? Correction is discipleship. We should yearn to be corrected and guided just as Apollos was.

And with that, it's also worth mentioning that Apollos is a good model of a teachable leader, a teachable speaker. Regardless of his status, regardless of his great character, regardless of his great competency, I'm sure Apollos had probably more education than Aquila and Priscilla combined.

But he still remains teachable. His heart was still teachable. It's sad today. Many leaders head for their own demise due to their hearts being closed off from being taught, being held accountable, and dare I say, being corrected.

And I think it's a warning to all of us to beware of any teacher who cannot even receive correction from a child. Beware of any teacher who cannot receive correction from just a child.

What unfolds here is the power of personal discipleship. Any Christian convinced that they are beyond the need of further instruction is bound to pride.

[14 : 22] Bound to pride. No matter how many degrees, how many letters you have after your name and your email signature, you're all in the process of growth. And we might also never miss the dynamic nature of discipleship as well within the church.

That simply one guy can't do it all. Priscilla and Aquila were co-laborers with Paul. They didn't call Paul and say, hey, we got a problem with Apollos back here.

You got to come back to Ephesus. No, they took it upon themselves to take responsibility for being within the vicinity of his ignorance, hearing the ignorance coming from the synagogue, and they took him aside in their hometown, Achaia, meaning Corinth.

So, 1 Corinthians 3 states that Paul planted, it's dynamic, Paul planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. And we see this taking shape and form within the book of Acts, even at this very moment.

You see, nothing about the Christian life qualifies us to boast. There's nothing that qualifies us to boast. No efforts that we have within the Christian life, no knowledge that we may attain, no status, no degrees, no Bible memory verses, no acts of service, no ministry endeavor.

[15 : 47] Nothing qualifies us to boast. Nothing compares to the glory of God, of which we can only boast in. See, Christian growth begins with humility, church.

Humility. And that fruit transpired in this passage. Apollos was then taught, he was disciplined by Aquila and Priscilla.

And look at the fruit in verse 26, or 27 and 28. He greatly helped believers over in Corinth, a place that Paul just was, where Paul just planted.

This is Apollos going and watering. But God only gets glory for the growth. He greatly helped believers, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

We ought to feel encouraged by our sense of being ill-equipped, church. You feel that you are ill-equipped even to the point of having a difficult time thinking about opening the Bible up with another Christian, because then people will realize how dumb you are, whatever that might look like.

[17 : 08] Certainly, you're not dumb. We ought to be encouraged by our sense, even if it's not true, of being ill-equipped. The problem is when our ill-equippedness, if I can make up a word this morning, closes us off from venturing into any equipping efforts, and we find ourselves isolating from other Christians, other Bible studies, all because our ill-equippedness is calling us and making us refrain from all of that.

Nobody benefits, not even God's glory benefits from that. It's an act of self-preservation, and it ought to never be something that we get used to in our Christian lives.

We have to be challenged. Church, be ill-equipped and open. Be disciple-able and open. There is great growth for those who humbly recognize their ill-equippedness, but remain open to any opportunity to grow.

people. But maybe for some, we have the opposite problem. We have the problem because we think that we've arrived. We know the Bible verses.

We serve more than even the pastor serves in the church. Do you believe that you have arrived at any certain level of Christian maturity today? Well, may we be reminded and remember that it is less painful for us to remove our pride than the Lord to strip it from us.

[18 : 48] It is less painful for us to remove our pride than the Lord and the painful process that the Lord will do to strip it from us.

We must repent either way in our ill-equippedness or our great equippedness. And we see the second section here as the passage continues.

Apollos, his disciples, sent out to Corinth to water the church and believers in Corinth. Paul returns to Ephesus and we see that he addresses in verse 1 through 3 a group of many Apolloses.

I'm making up all sorts of words today. They're big words. And we see that Apollos has kind of bred himself in Ephesus.

They share the same theology with Apollos. And I love how Alistair Begg says that these men, these 12 men Paul encounters are 12 almost Christians.

[20 : 05] 12 almost Christians. Why? Because if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him.

Apollos' teaching, just like the disciples here, the almost Christians here, they were all under the impression that the final expression of faith is the baptism of John rather than the baptism that John pointed to, which was of Christ, which involved what?

The Holy Spirit, the sealing, the set apart of a Christian for God's people. And in verse 4, there's similarities. Just as it were for Aquila and Priscilla discipling Apollos, so too it was for Paul with these 12 men.

However, the text is clear that these men were not ignorant in theology as Apollos was. They were ignorant in salvation.

There's a difference between these disciples here. In other words, they were not converted Christians. They didn't even know about the Holy Spirit.

[21 : 21] And in verse 5 and 6, these 12 men, after being discipled in the gospel of Jesus Christ, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 5, and experienced the Spirit's presence and power in this little mini Pentecost way, an expression, speaking in tongues and prophesying.

As we see in verse 6, we have to grapple with the text here because we know that the book of Acts is laid out in such a way where Luke has been commissioned by Theophilus, a funder, a donor, to make this work of how the church became established.

And so, he started with the ascension of Jesus that he told his disciples that you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, right?

Acts 1, 8. And we saw these mini Pentecost all along the way. The gospel breaches the walls of Jerusalem, and people are speaking in tongues and prophesying in different language.

It's not Babel church. It's actual language, preaching the gospel going through the walls of Jerusalem. And then it reaches all Samaria and all Judea.

[22 : 42] And guess what happens again? Speaking in tongues and prophesying. Reaching Cornelius' house to the ends of the earth. What happens again? Many Pentecost prophesying, speaking in tongues.

But this, this is odd. This is odd. How do we make of this? And so the question that we are often led to believe in, even denominations, is are tongues truly a public indicator of possessing the Spirit?

Are tongues the indicator? I mean, it's right here in the text, right? Are tongues, are these other languages, not Babel, other languages, true means of true conversion, expressions of true conversion?

Well, I believe that context is clear with a no. No. Tongues are languages, and if they are languages, we have to look at the fruit, look at the context.

What is happening to these disciples in Ephesus, that they might be preaching the gospel in other languages? Look at verse 10. Paul took these men, these twelve men, and guess what?

[24 : 00] All of Asia, they heard the word of the Lord. There was a work that needed to be broadcasted in this multi-ethnic region, and they heard the word of the Lord.

Now, many within our heavy Pentecostal region in Youngstown will conclude that tongues are a clear public indicator of salvation, that you have the Holy Spirit, you speak in tongues.

However, this would negate the entire context, the universal pattern in Acts. church, and not every conversion experience describes such manifestations.

And so we cannot isolate this instance, church, and create an entire Assemblies of God denomination upon one verse, lest we cherry-pick from Scripture.

Scripture. I've heard more stories of spiritual abuse go on within the seats of a church, of people who think that they don't have the Holy Spirit because they don't speak in tongues, and they live with guilt and shame, and they're crying out to God, why not?

[25 : 15] I love you. I know this. I do this. And leaders just abuse them and say, well, obviously, you do these signs in my name and do wonders in my name, but behold, I never knew you.

Try to tell that to youth group students, just as it was to my wife. Now, I love my Assemblies of God, my Pentecostal friends in this area, and I believe that many of them are genuine Christians.

I do. But their denomination sadly resembles a cult-like experience of spiritual mysticism and unknowns, of teaching tongue classes on Sunday mornings, how to speak in tongues, but most of all being money grabbers, looking for money.

What better form of getting money from people than to hold tongues over people's heads? And so the pattern is observed in every conversion experience is not tongues.

What's expressed in every conversion experience and acts? What is the common denominator, the common thread through conversion in the book of Acts?

[26 : 31] It's repentance and it's faith. And if repentance and faith are working hand in hand, that cannot be done apart from the Holy Spirit working in your hearts.

God, I'm getting goosebumps up here. What's the visible evidence then? Baptism!

Christian baptism! The sign and the seal that you are set apart and grafted into the family of God. You can throw tongues aside and see baptism.

Full immersion baptism. That's it. This is the gospel. And we must never forget how miracles, the role in miracles in this life, because miracles do happen.

I'm not ignorant enough to say that they don't happen. We can't ignore the fact that miracles served as wake-up calls. Tongues were a wake-up call to unbelieving Jews in the book of Acts.

[27 : 42] And this is descriptive. It's not prescriptive. This is Luke writing for Theophilus. This is how the church was established. Don't create a denomination over a couple verses.

Oh. Had their conversion not occurred this way, many would have continued in Ephesus to believe in errors that Apollos was encouraging.

And you see, our attention should instead realize that we can be committed religious people, just as these twelve almost Christians.

We can still be committed religious people and still be unconverted. Unconverted. This is a word for those in verse 8 to 10 who these men, these Jewish leaders, were stubborn in unbelief and slandered the way group of Christians.

Maybe there's some almost Christians here today that it's clear that the Lord has guided you through these doors today to hear the gospel, to dismantle the lies that you've been fed and abused with all your life.

[29 : 09] Well, maybe you are here today to hear that gospel, to have full assurance of your salvation, assurance that if there are any good people or good things in this life, you can't ever attribute them to yourself.

There is only one good person. There is only one good work done by Jesus in His life on the cross who died, was buried, and was raised.

The receipt says paid in full. This is good news. Today, you are invited to repent of your ignorance and to come to light this morning.

The gospel reorients our goodness by assigning anything good to the person and the work of Jesus Christ. Who are we then? We are rebellious people.

We need to repent. We need to believe. To turn from false assurance in ourselves and whatever you might think of works-based salvation, of speaking in tongues as evidence of salvation.

[30 : 18] Forget all of the garbage. Embrace the full assurance of Jesus Christ alone. How? By your faith alone, church. Amen.

And so, when salvation is concerned, ignorance is not bliss. Ignorance and salvation is hell.

There is no way around it. You might be a really good person. You might be better than me, helping the old lady across the street. You might even be a high-functioning teacher like Apollos and ignorantly encourage people down the highway to hell.

Or you might be a high-functioning believer who you really know your stuff. You really know the verses. You've discipled a plethora of people and ignorantly follow the wrong instruction or doctrine that produces almost Christians.

Either way, you might fashion it. There's a difficult main point. There's a difficult point in the text today. You can believe in Jesus and still get the gospel wrong. Some Christians can hold the banner, or some almost Christians can hold the banner of Jesus Christ high in the sky, wave the flag, Jesus Christ on it, but only be interested in themselves, what they get out of that relationship.

[31 : 50] They don't want Jesus. They want the benefits of Jesus. It's tough. The passage today really makes us examine ourselves, doesn't it? Later, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, urging them in 2 Corinthians 13 to examine themselves to see if they were of the faith.

Some may think that they are high or maybe low functioning, but there is no function greater than a Christian with a willing heart to grow and mature no matter how high or how low they believe they are.

church, my charge for you is to remain willing to grow, to remain willing to grow. Sunday morning is simply not enough church.

Sunday evening helps as we have our Bible study, but house churches, personal discipleship, reading one on one with another Christian are vital to our growth.

church. If you want to check me on that, try it for at least three months' time and then talk to me. And I will be assured that you will tell me how much you have grown as a Christian.

[33 : 06] How might this text materialize in your life today? Well, the days of ignorance are over, so may we all come alive in full awareness of our deficiency while embracing Jesus Christ's sufficiency in our lives.

Amen? Amen. Let's pray.