

Acts 19:8-20

The vital importance of the gift of the Spirit.

(Diversity of Christian experience, raises some perplexing and difficult questions about what we should expect as we experience Christ's Spirit.)

Introduction:

- We strive for unity in our experience of Christian confession, love, and purpose. We also are committed to diversity in the manifestation of Spiritual gifts for ministry.
- But what about the broad variety of spiritual experiences that we observe and experience? What are we to make of all the interesting testimonies that are offered as people bear witness to Jesus?

2. Authority and power in Spiritual warfare.

⁸ And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading {them} about the kingdom of God. ⁹ But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ And this took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. ¹¹ And God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, ¹² so that handkerchiefs or aprons were even carried from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out. ¹³ But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." ¹⁴ And seven sons of one Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. ¹⁵ And the evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" ¹⁶ And the man, in whom was the evil spirit, leaped on them and subdued all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. ¹⁷ And this became known to all, both Jews and Greeks, who lived in Ephesus; and fear fell upon them all and the name of the Lord Jesus was being magnified. ¹⁸ Many also of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices. ¹⁹ And many of those who practiced magic brought their books together and {began} burning them in the sight of all; and they counted up the price of them and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰ So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing.

- See apptoteach.org (Theology file #317) for information on "deliverance" ministry and spiritual warfare.
- This paragraph speaks to us of non-believing Jews who were attempting to use the name of Jesus to draw on the power of God. The very demonic spirits they were trying to exorcize exposed the true elegance of the Jewish exorcists.

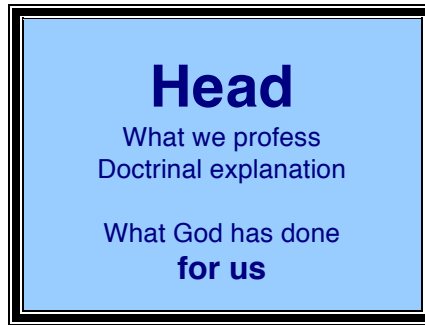
- A parallel exists today in that many have chosen to identify with the Christian community for reasons other than repentance and faith.
- Why would people use the name of Jesus when they have not obeyed the Gospel?
 1. **Tradition** – “It’s a family thing.” “it’s a part of being a good American.”
 2. **Friends** – “I will go where my friends go.”
 3. **The local church** – “I do not want to be left out of this great social community.”
 4. **Syncretism** – “It won’t hurt to have another spiritual connection.”
 5. **Economic gain** – “It is good for business.”
 6. **Fear** – “What will happen to me if I am not included?”
 7. **Spiritual aesthetics** - “I like the feel, power, and the mystery of religion.”
 8. **The building** – “I like the architecture.”
 9. **The Pastor** – “I like the pastor.”
- It is important to make a distinction between believers and non-believers for a number of reasons.
 1. **The apostles** made this distinction. They were concerned about the purity of the Christian fellowship. Holiness (set apart from the world) was a distinction of the church)
 2. The **needs, standards,** and **expectations** of believers are distinct. This started with water baptism, an open confession of faith, etc.
 3. **Harmony** in vision and values required a common spirit. The Body of Christ is defined by the presence of the Holy Spirit and it was important that those in the fellowship were indwelt with that Spirit.
- What criteria has the church used to identify its true membership?
 1. Prior to the Protestant Reformation four criteria marked the true church.
 - a. The **Unity** of the faith. The church is in agreement with respect to the basic tenants of the faith as it has come down through history.
 - **Jn.17:11** “Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, that name which Thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as We are.” (17:21)
 - **Rom.12:5** “so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”
 - b. The **Holiness** of the covenant community. The church has doctrinal, ethical, and organizational boundaries that are defended.
 - “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matt.16:18; I Tim.3:16)
 - The true church while subject to apostate teaching will never decline into total forgetfulness of the gospel.
 - The church can never be said (in this age) to be without fault or infallible.
 - The history of the church includes periods of varying degrees of departure from holy doctrine and behavior.

- c. The **Catholicity** of its scope. There is but one faith community and organization that spans space and time. It is an ideal that has not yet been fully experienced but is a calling and goal.
 - **I Jn.1:1** “that which was from the beginning which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched- this we proclaim”
 - The scope of teaching includes all that is necessary for salvation.
 - The scope requires a missionary extension to all cultures and places.
 - The scope requires a sensitivity to the past heritage of the church.
 - While holding to core orthodoxy, the church would have to be adaptable to and tolerant of various cultural expressions of the faith.
 - d. The **Apostolicity** of its leadership. There is a direct descent from Peter.
 - The Catholicity of the church is based on the Apostolicity of its preaching and practice.
 - **Eph.2:20** “having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone.” Eph.4:10-16
 - The Apostolic foundation of the church includes:
 - a. Gathering – for worship, ministry, and body life.
 - b. Scattering – for spreading the message of hope to the world.
2. The Protestant standard focused attention on three issues.
- a. The proper ministry of the **Word**. The true church teaches / preaches the Biblical message of Life in Christ and receives that message.
 - b. The proper administration of the **Sacraments**. The true church Baptizes in water and serves the Lord’s Supper.
 - c. The proper exercise of church **discipline**. The true church has moral and doctrinal boundaries that are defended.
2. The meaning of community.
- a. The basic elements of a community.
 - Common vision and values -
 - Shared soul-shaping experiences -
 - Intimate communication –
 - Unique identity -
 - b. The United States of America illustrate these elements on a national level.
 1. At some point in the early history of the USA the independent colonies became the United States. We went from “the united states ARE” to “the United States IS.”
 2. We share a common vision expressed in our governmental system, our laws, and “the American dream.”
 3. We share common soul-shaping experiences like a civil war, Vietnam, etc.
 4. We experience a level of intimate communication through our laws, media, transport systems, common language, etc.
 5. We all claim a common name – American.

- c. Acts 2:37-47 illustrates these elements in the early church.
 - 1. The Kingdom of God inspired by the Holy Spirit bound the believers to a common system of values and vision.
 - 2. Repentance and the Baptism with the Holy Spirit was a shared experience.
 - 3. The early believers were living together, even sharing material goods.
 - 4. The early church was identified with Christ.
- b. The authentic church today must be (in some way) a community. It can not just have a label, or manage certain tasks, or preach a certain message.
- What criteria should our church use to identify authentic believers?
 - 1. **Water baptism** and open confession of faith.
 - 2. **The Lord's Supper** and fellowship with the church.
 - Love for other Christians,
 - Service in ministry,
 - 3. **Moral conscience** and discipline.
 - 4. **An integration** of head, heart, and hands.
- See apptoteach.org (Theology file #802, #803) for information on “unity and discipline” in the church.

1 Timothy 1

“13 Retain the standard of **sound words** which you have heard from me, in the **faith** and **love** which are in Christ Jesus. 14 Guard through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.”



True Christian faith

