

## THE BEGINNING OF A GREAT MINISTRY

Acts 19:1-12

Paul now comes to Ephesus, where he remained for three years. In this great center he firmly planted the standard of the cross. When he arrived there, Paul found a small group who were zealously religious, but were only partially correct in their understanding of Christianity. This is a clear example of a field where someone had dropped a seed in fertile ground and it had sprung up and had brought forth a bad harvest. Either the seed was faulty, the soil was faulty, or the culture was faulty. Hence, the harvest was faulty. The real trouble is not hard to find. The preceding chapter tells us that Apollos had been there preaching a partial gospel. It is not difficult to reason that the converts would be but partially correct. That chapter also tells that a good layman and his wife took Apollos in and corrected his error, but they could not eradicate the impressions that this Jewish preacher had made in the hearts and lives of his converts.

### I. A Fragment Of Truth Is Dangerous.

1. Most of the errors of life have their beginning in a fragment of truth. Practically every false religion in the world had its origin in a partial truth. Many of the most nefarious doctrines began with a partial truth. Most of the fanatics began their careers on some segment of truth. The reckless and ruthless leaders of the world have launched their campaign on halftrue theories.
2. Most of the failures of the world have been almost a success. They have been nearly right. They have been within striking distance of their goal. They have seen the shores of their promised land, but have not crossed over.
3. It is possible for souls to be saved on a fragment of truth, but it is not possible to build a great life on a fragment of truth. These men were probably saved, but their weaknesses put shackles on their lives. They had a mediocre understanding of the principles of Christianity. Because of this, they could not be constructive nor productive to the highest degree. One cannot rise higher than one's understanding and one's conviction.
4. The church of today needs more than good impulses. It needs more than sincerity. It needs more than orthodoxy. It needs more than eloquence and enthusiasm. It needs more than programs and A-1 standards. The wider, the fuller the grasp of truth is, the greater is the prospect for a noble work. One may live a fairly comfortable life within the narrow limits of a partial understanding, but one cannot live the fullest and noblest life thus circumscribed.

### II. John's Baptism.

1. These men had either heard John preach, had repented because of his teachings, had been baptized by him, and had left immediately before the coming of Christ; or, it was by the preaching of Apollos that they had accepted the teachings of John and the baptism of John. The latter is the more probable.
2. John's gospel held up a future Christ. He was One who was to come. These men, being Jews, already looked for that coming Christ and so sincere were they in their anticipation of Him that they accepted this baptism. They knew nothing of the tragedy of Calvary. They knew nothing of the glories of the resurrection. They knew nothing of the victories of the day of Pentecost.
3. Scriptural baptism preserves the story of an historical fact--the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. It is also a proclamation. It is a public pledge for a better life. It is a prophecy expressing the confidence and the assurance that

some day our bodies, too, will be raised up from death by the power that raised Jesus from the grave.

### III. An Unlimited Christian Experience Is Possible.

1. Did you receive the Holy Ghost when you believed?  
This is a pertinent question for Christians everywhere. Is this a special experience from one's conversion? Yes. Certainly one cannot be saved without the work of the Holy Spirit, but the thing referred to here was receiving the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. It suggests that, in addition to being saved, one may be endowed by the Holy Spirit with a new and added power for work. One may be saved without being specifically anointed by the Holy Spirit for definite work.
2. The Holy Spirit does more for one than to consummate his salvation.  
He convicts of sin. He gives one faith. He helps one to pray. He gives one power for work. He makes one's work effective. He preserves and protects.
3. These men knew nothing of Pentecost.  
They knew nothing of the power of God which falls on men with irresistible force. Every Christian needs a frequent rededication of life to God. This brings one into a closer fellowship with God. It gives one a new sense of the presence and power of God. It gives one a new effectiveness in his labors.
4. Without the Holy Spirit, one must live a limited life.  
He will live on a fraction of his possibilities. Such a life may be compared to a six-cylinder car trying to run on the power of four cylinders. It may go, but its going is jerky and uncertain. Too many of us live beneath our privileges. We have never tapped the source of our power. There is such a thing as salvation plus.

### IV. Christianity Is Always Militant. Verses 8-10.

For three months Paul exercised his ministry in the synagogue; the majority opposed the Word; Paul separated the Jewish believers and formed a Christian assembly in Ephesus. The Christian Gospel has always been a testing and dividing energy. From the beginning Christianity was a militant cause. It has always been positive, never negative. It has always been aggressive, never static. It has gained its victories by offensive rather than by defensive methods.

1. Such Christianity demands vigorous preaching.  
Paul entered the synagogue, the stronghold of the Jews. The nature of his preaching in the synagogue was bold, positive, persuasive, and convincing. He refused to be entangled in strange philosophies, current affairs, or political harangues, but presented one thing only, to wit, the kingdom of God.
2. Such preaching will produce positive characters.  
There will always be two extremes resulting from such preaching--men who would die to defend it and men who would die to defeat it. One cannot listen to such preaching without being better or worse. Some were hardened, some refused to believe, and some became actively aggressive in circulating evil reports against Paul. Vigorous preaching always stirs up the devil. The opposition created may be a hopeful sign of the good that is being accomplished.
3. Such opposition requires great wisdom.  
Paul's leaving the synagogue does not mean that they ran him out of town, but that he moved to another place in the town. He hired a school house from Tyrannus. He took his disciples with him. He separated the true from the false. By so doing, he was able to keep confusion out of his meeting and have a better atmosphere in which to present his cause. If divisions and oppositions make impossible a man's best in a given locality, it might be wisdom to find a new place in order that he might be free to do his best.