

The Book of Acts, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 24: Corinth and Ephesus

Acts 18:1–19:41

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Acts 18-19 follows Paul in Corinth and Ephesus and touches several important truths. What is doctrinally at stake includes God's encouraging presence and sovereignty in evangelism, the value of ordinary believers as fellow workers, the difference between John's baptism and baptism into Christ and the importance of proper baptism, the supremacy of Christ over the occult and idolatry, and the clean break the gospel requires from sin.

The heaviest doctrinal weight falls on the rebaptism of the Ephesian disciples who had known only John's baptism (19:1-7). Handle this exactly as the church requires: teach the difference between John's baptism (a preparatory baptism of repentance pointing forward to Christ) and Christian baptism (into Christ, in His name, for the forgiveness of sins), and the importance of proper, scriptural baptism. Show that a deficient baptism is not enough, and that those improperly baptized need correct, scriptural baptism into Christ.

Yet aim at the heart. This passage calls students to courageous witness in the confidence that God is at work, to serve as humble fellow workers, to make a clean break from the occult and sin, to understand and value proper baptism, and to count the cost when the gospel collides with their interests. Help them become bold, humble, clean, and well-grounded disciples.

Question 1

Student Question:

When Paul was discouraged and facing opposition, the Lord told him, do not be afraid, for I am with you, and I have many in this city who are my people (vv. 18:9-10). What does this encouragement reveal about God's presence and His prior work in evangelism?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul, weary and facing hostility in Corinth, received a timely word from the Lord: do not be afraid, go on speaking, for I am with you, and I have many in this city who are my people. This encouragement reveals two great truths that sustain every worker for the gospel.

First, God is present with His servants. I am with you. Paul was not laboring alone; the risen Christ was with him, just as He promised to be with His people to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). We never witness or serve in our own strength or by ourselves; the Lord is present, sustaining and emboldening us.

Second, God is already at work before us. I have many in this city who are my people, people not yet converted but whom God knew He would draw to Himself through the gospel. The harvest in Corinth was prepared by God. Our evangelism does not create faith out of nothing; it joins a work God is already doing in hearts He is preparing.

Help students draw courage from this. We often approach witness with fear, as though everything depended on us and the field were barren. But the Lord is with us, and He has people in every place whom He is drawing. Our task is to keep speaking and not be silent; God's task is to be present and to gather His own. This frees us to witness boldly, trusting the One who is already at work.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's presence with His servants in the work (Matthew 28:20)
- God already at work before us in preparing hearts
- Evangelism as joining a work God is doing, not creating faith ourselves
- Courage grounded in God's presence and prior work

Discussion Prompts

- What two truths does the Lord's encouragement to Paul reveal?
- How does knowing God is already at work change your view of evangelism?
- How should God's presence shape the way you face fear in witness?

Question 2

Student Question:

God's promise that He had many people in Corinth gave Paul courage to keep speaking (vv. 18:9-11). Where does fear hold you back from witnessing or serving? How would it change things to truly believe that God is with you and already at work in the people around you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul's fear was real, and so is ours. Fear is one of the great obstacles to witness and service, fear of rejection, of awkwardness, of failure, of opposition. The Lord met Paul's fear not by removing the opposition but by reassuring him of God's presence and prior work.

Invite honest reflection. Where does fear hold me back from witnessing or serving? Is it fear of what people will think, fear that my efforts will fail, fear of conflict or rejection? Naming our fears helps us bring them into the light of God's promises.

The antidote to fear is not greater self-confidence but greater confidence in God. If I truly believed that the Lord is with me and already at work in the people around me, drawing some of them to Himself, how would that change my boldness? Much of our fear assumes we are alone and everything depends on us, which is not true.

Encourage students to take God's promise to heart. The same Lord who told Paul I am with you, and I have many in this city is with us, and He has people He is drawing in our own circles. This truth can loosen the grip of fear and free us to speak and serve. Where is God calling you to keep speaking and not be silent, trusting that He is with you?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Fear as an obstacle to witness and service
- Confidence in God rather than self as the antidote to fear
- God's presence and prior work loosening the grip of fear
- Freedom to speak and serve through trust in God

Discussion Prompts

- Where does fear hold you back from witnessing or serving?
- What fears most often silence you?
- How would believing God is with you and at work change things?

Question 3

Student Question:

Aquila and Priscilla opened their home to Paul, worked alongside him, and took Apollos aside to explain the way of God more accurately (vv. 18:2-3, 24-26). What does this couple teach us about the vital role of ordinary believers as fellow workers in the gospel?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Aquila and Priscilla are among the unsung heroes of the New Testament. They were not apostles or appointed leaders, but ordinary believers, tentmakers by trade, who served the gospel in quiet, vital ways. They opened their home to Paul, worked alongside him, hosted a church in their house (1 Corinthians 16:19), and risked their lives for him (Romans 16:3-4).

Notice their ministry to Apollos. When they heard this gifted, eloquent preacher who knew only John's baptism, they did not publicly embarrass him or merely criticize him; they took him aside privately and explained the way of God more accurately. This was a humble, gracious, behind-the-scenes ministry of instruction that helped shape one of the early church's great teachers.

This teaches the vital role of ordinary believers. The gospel advances not only through prominent leaders but through countless faithful members who show hospitality, work alongside others, mentor and instruct, and serve in quiet ways. Every-member ministry is God's design; the body is built up as each part works (Ephesians 4:16).

Help students see themselves in Aquila and Priscilla. You do not need an office or a platform to be a vital fellow worker in the gospel. Through hospitality, friendship, encouragement, teaching,

and humble service, ordinary believers do extraordinary good. The church needs many Aquilas and Priscillas, faithful couples and individuals who quietly advance the work of Christ.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The vital role of ordinary believers as fellow workers
- Hospitality, partnership, and quiet service in the gospel
- Gracious, private instruction that builds others up (vv. 24-26)
- Every-member ministry building up the body (Ephesians 4:16)

Discussion Prompts

- What do Aquila and Priscilla teach about the role of ordinary believers?
- How did they minister to Apollos, and what does their manner teach us?
- Why is every-member ministry essential to the church?

Question 4

Student Question:

Aquila and Priscilla served through hospitality, partnership, and the patient mentoring of others (vv. 18:2-3, 26). What is your part as a fellow worker in the gospel? Where might God be calling you to greater hospitality, encouragement, or helping others grow?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The example of Aquila and Priscilla presses a personal question about our own part in the gospel work. Every believer is called to be a fellow worker, contributing to the building up of the church and the spread of the gospel in the ways God has gifted and placed us.

Invite honest reflection. What is my part as a fellow worker? Am I using my home for hospitality, my words for encouragement, my knowledge to help others grow, my presence to support the work? Or am I a spectator, leaving the ministry to others while I remain on the sidelines?

Help students think concretely about the ordinary ministries Aquila and Priscilla modeled. Hospitality opens our homes and lives to others. Encouragement strengthens the weary. Mentoring and teaching help others grow, as Priscilla and Aquila helped Apollos. Partnership comes alongside the work of the gospel with practical support. These are within the reach of every believer.

Encourage one concrete step. Where might God be calling me to greater hospitality, encouragement, or helping someone grow? Perhaps it is to open my home, to invest in a younger believer, to come alongside a gospel worker, to use my gifts more fully. The church is built up as each of us, like this faithful couple, takes up our part as fellow workers.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Every believer called to be a fellow worker
- Hospitality, encouragement, mentoring, and partnership as ministries
- Using our homes, words, and gifts for the gospel
- The danger of being a spectator rather than a participant

Discussion Prompts

- What is your part as a fellow worker in the gospel?
- Are you participating or spectating in the ministry of the church?
- Where is God calling you to greater hospitality, encouragement, or mentoring?

Question 5

Student Question:

In Ephesus, would-be exorcists were overpowered when they tried to use Jesus' name as a magic formula, and new believers burned their costly books of magic (vv. 19:13-20). What do these events teach about the supremacy of Christ over the occult and about making a clean break with such practices?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Ephesus was a center of magic and the occult, and the gospel confronted these dark powers directly. Two events stand out. First, the seven sons of Sceva tried to cast out a demon by invoking the name of Jesus as a magic formula, and the demon overpowered them, leaving them beaten and fleeing naked. Second, many new believers, convicted by this, brought out their valuable books of magic and burned them publicly.

The sons of Sceva teach that the name of Jesus is not a magic formula to be manipulated. Power over the spiritual realm is not accessed by reciting the right words; it belongs to those who actually belong to Christ. The demon mocked them: Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you? The occult cannot be combined with Christianity, nor can the name of Jesus be used as a tool for those who do not submit to Him.

The burning of the magic books teaches the clean break the gospel requires from such practices. These believers did not merely tuck their old occult materials away; they destroyed them publicly, at great cost (the value was enormous). Coming to Christ meant a decisive, costly break with the dark practices of their old life. There is no peaceful coexistence between Christ and the occult.

Help students grasp both truths. Christ is supreme over all spiritual powers; the occult is real but it is no match for Him, and it has no place in the life of His people. And coming to Christ requires a clean, decisive break with such things, however costly. The Ephesians model the radical repentance that genuine conversion produces.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ's supremacy over the occult and spiritual powers
- The name of Jesus not a magic formula to be manipulated (vv. 13-16)
- No coexistence between Christ and the occult
- The clean, costly break with dark practices (vv. 18-19)
- Radical repentance as the fruit of genuine conversion

Discussion Prompts

- What does the failure of the sons of Sceva teach about the name of Jesus?
- What does the burning of the magic books teach about coming to Christ?
- Why can there be no coexistence between Christ and the occult?

Question 6

Student Question:

The Ephesian believers made a clean, costly break with their old practices by burning their magic books (v. 19:19). Is there something in your life, a habit, a relationship, a practice, that God is calling you to make a clean break from? What is holding you back, and what would a decisive break look like?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Ephesians' bonfire is a vivid picture of decisive repentance. They did not negotiate with their old life or keep their magic books as a hedge; they burned them, making a clean, costly, irreversible break. Genuine conversion often calls for exactly this kind of decisive action.

Invite honest reflection. Is there something in my life that God is calling me to make a clean break from, a sinful habit, a harmful relationship, a practice or entanglement that has no place in a life devoted to Christ? Often we know what it is, and we have been keeping it tucked away rather than destroying it.

Explore what holds us back. The Ephesians' books were valuable; the break was costly. Our clean breaks are costly too, the pleasure we would give up, the relationship we would lose, the comfort or identity tied to the thing. We hesitate because the break feels like loss. But Jesus taught that it is better to cut off what causes us to sin than to keep it and be destroyed (Matthew 5:29-30).

Encourage one decisive step. A clean break is not a vague intention to do better; it is a definite, often costly action, removing the temptation, ending the entanglement, destroying the thing, like burning the books. What is the decisive break God is calling you to make, and what would it look like to actually do it this week? The freedom on the other side is worth the cost.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Decisive, costly repentance and clean breaks with sin
- Genuine conversion calling for definite action
- Cutting off what causes us to sin (Matthew 5:29-30)
- The freedom on the other side of a costly break

Discussion Prompts

- What is God calling you to make a clean break from?
- What is holding you back from a decisive break?
- What would actually doing it look like this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

When the gospel began to threaten the worship of Artemis and the silversmiths' profits, Demetrius stirred up a riot to defend their idol and their income (vv. 19:23-41). What does this teach about how the gospel confronts idolatry and vested interests, and why the truth often provokes opposition?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The riot in Ephesus reveals what happens when the gospel collides with idolatry and the interests built upon it. Demetrius, a silversmith who made shrines of Artemis, saw that Paul's preaching was turning people away from idols and threatening his trade. He roused his fellow craftsmen by appealing to both their religion and their wallets, and the city erupted in chaos, chanting great is Artemis of the Ephesians for two hours.

This teaches that the gospel confronts idolatry directly. Paul's message that gods made with hands are not gods undermined the entire idol industry. The gospel does not make peace with false worship; it calls people away from idols to the living God, and this inevitably threatens everything built on idolatry.

It also teaches that the truth often provokes opposition, especially when it threatens people's interests. Notice that the deepest motive was economic: the craftsmen's livelihood depended on idolatry. When the gospel threatens not just people's beliefs but their money, status, or way of life, opposition can become fierce. People will fight to protect the interests their idols serve.

Help students see the pattern. The gospel is not a harmless private religion; it confronts the idols of every age and the interests built upon them, and that confrontation provokes resistance. We should not be surprised when the truth meets opposition, particularly where it threatens what people hold dear. The gospel that turned Ephesus upside down still confronts the idols and interests of our own day.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel confronting idolatry directly (vv. 23-27)
- Idolatry intertwined with economic and social interests
- The truth provoking opposition when it threatens interests
- The gospel as no harmless private religion
- Expecting resistance where the gospel confronts what people hold dear

Discussion Prompts

- How does the gospel confront idolatry and the interests built on it?
- Why did the gospel provoke such fierce opposition in Ephesus?
- Why does the truth often meet resistance when it threatens people's interests?

Question 8

Student Question:

The Ephesians resisted the gospel because it threatened their religion and their livelihood (vv. 19:23-27). Where do the claims of the gospel conflict with your own interests, comfort, or way of life? Are you willing to follow Christ even when it costs you something you value?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Ephesian craftsmen resisted the gospel because it threatened their interests. This confronts us with a searching question: where do the claims of Christ conflict with my own interests, and am I willing to follow Him even when it costs me?

Invite honest reflection. Where does the gospel threaten my comfort, my income, my reputation, my relationships, my way of life? Following Christ may cost us a business practice we know is wrong, a relationship that pulls us from Him, an ambition that crowds Him out, a comfort we are reluctant to surrender. The gospel makes claims on every area, including the ones we hold most tightly.

Like the Ephesians, we can be tempted to resist the gospel where it threatens what we value, not by rioting, but by quietly refusing to let Christ have that area, rationalizing, or keeping Him at arm's length there. The question is whether Christ is truly Lord, even over the things that cost us.

Encourage students to count the cost honestly. Jesus called His followers to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Him, warning that whoever would save his life will lose it (Luke 9:23-24). Following Christ will cost us something we value; the question is whether He is worth it. He is. Where is the gospel calling you to follow even at a cost, and will you?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel's claims conflicting with our interests and comfort
- The temptation to resist where Christ threatens what we value

- Christ's lordship extending to the areas that cost us
- Counting the cost of following Christ (Luke 9:23-24)

Discussion Prompts

- Where do the claims of the gospel conflict with your interests or comfort?
- Where are you tempted to keep Christ at arm's length because following Him costs you?
- Are you willing to follow Christ even when it costs you something you value?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul found disciples in Ephesus who had received only John's baptism, and after explaining the difference, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (vv. 19:1-7). What is the difference between John's baptism and baptism into Christ, and what does this teach about the importance of proper, scriptural baptism?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, and it teaches an important truth about baptism that is easy to overlook. When Paul came to Ephesus, he found about twelve disciples who, like Apollos, had received only the baptism of John. They had not even heard that the Holy Spirit had been given. Paul recognized that their baptism was deficient, explained the difference, and had them baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Consider the difference between the two baptisms. John's baptism was a real baptism, commanded by God, a baptism of repentance for the preparation of the people, pointing forward to the One who was to come, Jesus (v. 4; Mark 1:4). It was preparatory and forward-looking. But it was not Christian baptism. It did not unite people with Christ in His death and resurrection, for Christ had not yet died and risen when John baptized. Christian baptism, by contrast, is baptism into Christ, in His name, into His death and resurrection, for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27). John's baptism prepared people for Christ; baptism into Christ joins people to Him.

Now notice what Paul did. He did not regard these disciples' John-baptism as sufficient just because it was sincere and God-given in its time. Once Christ had come, died, risen, and commanded baptism in His name, John's baptism was no longer the baptism God required. So Paul taught them, and on hearing this they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus (v. 5). This was not a meaningless repetition; it was their first valid Christian baptism. Their earlier baptism, though sincere, was the wrong baptism for this side of the cross.

This teaches the importance of proper, scriptural baptism. Baptism is not valid simply because water was applied or because the person was sincere. Scriptural baptism is baptism into Christ, in His name, for the forgiveness of sins, by immersion, understanding what it is for. When a

person's baptism lacks these essentials, whether it was the wrong baptism (like John's after the cross), or done for the wrong reason, or not into Christ, it is not the baptism the New Testament requires. The Ephesian disciples show us that such a person needs to be properly baptized, as they were. This is not rebaptism in the sense of repeating a valid baptism, but receiving for the first time the scriptural baptism into Christ.

Pastorally, this calls us to take baptism seriously and to make sure ours was scriptural. It is a loving and important question to ask: was I baptized as the New Testament teaches, into Christ, in His name, for the forgiveness of my sins, understanding what I was doing? Like Paul with the Ephesians, we should be willing to teach the difference and, where someone's baptism was deficient, to help them obey the Lord in proper, scriptural baptism. God is not honored by sincerity in a deficient baptism, but by faith expressed in the baptism He has appointed. Help students see that baptism into Christ matters, and that getting it right is worth every care.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- John's baptism as a preparatory baptism of repentance pointing to Christ (v. 4; Mark 1:4)
- Christian baptism as into Christ, in His name, for forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4)
- John's baptism no longer sufficient after Christ's death and resurrection
- The Ephesians' baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus as their first valid Christian baptism (v. 5)
- Proper baptism requiring the right form, name, purpose, and understanding
- Those improperly baptized needing scriptural baptism into Christ
- The importance of ensuring our own baptism was scriptural

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between John's baptism and baptism into Christ?
- Why did Paul have these sincere disciples baptized again in the name of the Lord Jesus?
- What does this teach about the importance of proper, scriptural baptism?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back over this whole passage, God's encouragement, faithful fellow workers, the clean break with the occult, and the importance of proper baptism, name one specific way the Lord is calling you to respond, in bold witness, faithful service, decisive repentance, or being well-grounded in the faith, and what is one step you will take this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone draws the lesson to a personal response. Acts 18-19 calls us to witness boldly trusting God is at work, to serve as humble fellow workers, to make clean breaks with sin and

the occult, to count the cost of following Christ, and to understand and value proper, scriptural baptism.

Invite each person to name one concrete step. Perhaps it is to witness boldly where fear has held them back, to take up a ministry as a fellow worker, to make a decisive break with something in their life, to follow Christ where it costs them, or to make sure their own baptism was scriptural.

Keep the focus on the word that grew mightily and prevailed (v. 20). Despite fear, opposition, the occult, and idolatry, the gospel triumphed in Corinth and Ephesus. The same powerful word is at work in us. Transformation comes through responding to it faithfully.

Close by reminding students that the same Lord who stood with Paul, raised up faithful fellow workers, overcame the powers of darkness, and grounded His people in the truth is at work in them, emboldening, equipping, cleansing, and establishing them in the faith.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Personal response to God's presence, the call to serve, and the truth
- Bold witness, faithful service, and decisive repentance
- Being well-grounded in scriptural baptism and the faith
- The word of the Lord growing mightily and prevailing (v. 20)

Discussion Prompts

- What most challenged or moved you in this passage?
- What specific step toward witness, service, repentance, or being well-grounded will you take?
- How can this group encourage and pray for you?