

World Wide Witness: Healthy Church Part 1

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[0 : 0 0] Then what baptism did you receive? John's baptism, they replied. Paul said, John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.

On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all.

Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate. They refused to believe and publicly maligned the way.

So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years, so that all of the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured, and the evil spirits left them.

[1 : 0 4] Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.

Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish high priest, were doing this. One day the evil spirit answered them, Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?

Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding. When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor.

Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to 50,000 drachma.

In this way, the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. Thanks very much, Ross.

[2 : 2 3] Well, keep your Bibles open there at Acts 19. And we'll have a look at this together.

Well, let's pray first. Our Father, thank you again for your word.

Thank you for its impact upon many lives. Thank you for the evidence of its work on campus in student life.

And we pray that as the uncover, the Luke's Gospels, go and are read and are discussed with people, that they would find the real Jesus through those books.

And we pray for ourselves now as we read and study Acts, that we also would meet Jesus. And we would understand more of who God is and what it is to be his church and to be his people.

[3 : 38] So we ask for your help in this this morning. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, when I was growing up at home, my mum had a great way of diagnosing if we were sick or if we were healthy.

She basically had two very simple tests. One was bleeding and the other one was temperature. So if I woke up in the morning complaining of a sore tummy or an aching head, well, she would apply her diagnosis test, which she said had been in her family for generations and done her very well and the same for us as well.

So there I would be with my sore tummy and sore head and she'd say, Are you bleeding anywhere? No. Have you got a temperature? And we'd check the temperature. Well, you haven't got a temperature, you're not bleeding, you're okay.

So get up and off you go to school. And that was basically the way that it was. Who needs a GP when you have a sophisticated health test like that? But the question we want to be asking is, How do we diagnose or how can we assess the health of the church?

How do we know if this church is healthy or is it sick? How do we know if it's healthy or sick? Well, as Paul went on his church planting trips, he sought to establish churches that were healthy.

[5 : 09] Having returned from his trip to Europe, which we were looking at over the last couple of weeks, he makes it his business to go back to all of those churches that he's planted over the last five years to strengthen them.

So chapter 18, verse 23, we read, After spending some time in Antioch, Paul set out from there, and Antioch was his home church, and he set out from there and he travelled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, which is modern-day Turkey, strengthening all the disciples.

Chapter 19, verse 1, While Apollos was in Corinth, he was doing the same things there, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus.

So for the next two chapters, Luke, who's the author of Acts, spends considerable time recording for us this particular visit to the city of Ephesus.

And chapter 19 is primarily about his first visit as he establishes the church, and then chapter 20 is primarily about his second visit as he goes and strengthens the church, because he's all about wanting healthy churches.

[6 : 30] So what we want to do this morning is to go with Paul to Ephesus, and as we do, we'll discover what makes a healthy church. And there are four tests that we are going to apply to see if we are a healthy church or a sick church.

And before we do that, I just wonder, is the recording device, has that been turned on? Does anybody know? It is, yeah. Thanks. So the first test is this.

Are we genuinely converted? Are we genuinely converted? Well, look at chapter 19, verse 1. We're told there that he arrived at Ephesus, and there Paul found some disciples.

Now there's a question mark over this. Are they really disciples? Because he asked this question in verse 2. He asked them, Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?

Because the mark of a genuine believer is that you have received the Holy Spirit. Verse 2. They answered, No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.

[7 : 50] Now that seems very odd, doesn't it? Because how can you be a true disciple? How can you really be a Christian if you've never heard of the Holy Spirit? And that seems to be Paul's point.

So verse 3. He asked them, Then what baptism did you receive? John's baptism, they replied. And Paul said, Well, John's baptism was a baptism of repentance.

He told the people that they were to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus. So it seems that these so-called disciples that he's just bumped into had completely missed the point of John's teaching.

Well, what was John's teaching? Well, go back to Luke's Gospel, chapter 3. Keep your finger in Acts 19. Go back to Luke's Gospel, chapter 3. So this is Luke's Gospel, which he wrote, and he also wrote Acts.

And in Luke, chapter 3, we read there that John's preaching was all about the way of preparing the way for Jesus. So he didn't want people to follow him.

[9 : 00] He wanted people to follow Jesus. So in Luke, chapter 3, verse 3, we read that John went into all the country around the Jordan preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

As it's written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, a voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way for the Lord. Make straight paths for him.

Every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low. In other words, there's going to be an equality, a level playing field. The crooked road shall become straight, the rough way smooth, and all mankind will see God's salvation.

Now go down to verse 15. The people were waiting expectantly and were all wondering in their hearts if John might possibly be the Christ, if he's Jesus.

Verse 16, But John answered them all and said, I baptise you with water, but one more powerful and I will come. That's Jesus. The straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.

[10 : 09] He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Now go back to Acts 19. You see, it's clear that these people, well, they'd heard about John the Baptist and it seems they were just simply followers of John.

They were not really true disciples. They weren't followers of Jesus. They had claimed to be disciples, but they had never actually believed in Jesus and so they had never received the Holy Spirit.

So in Acts 19, verse 5, we read after Paul had spoken to them on hearing this, they were baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus.

Baptism being that outward sign that they were now inwardly trusting in Jesus. And verse 6, When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

And there were about twelve men in all. So from this account, we can have a clear picture of what genuine conversion really is. And I have it there on the screen.

[11 : 18] First and primarily, it is a trust in the person of Jesus Christ. So in verse 4, Paul is referring back to John the Baptist and he said, he was telling people to believe in the one coming after him that is in Jesus.

So it is only faith in Jesus and his work on the cross that is going to save us and make us right with God. And then second, as a result of our trust in Jesus, is the receiving of the Holy Spirit in verse 6.

So when they had come to believe, Paul placed his hands on them and the Holy Spirit came on them. You see, the Spirit comes at our conversion, not at some subsequent or later time, kind of years later or months later.

It comes at our conversion. And then third, as a sign that we have trusted Jesus and that we have received the Spirit, there was the sign of baptism.

In verse 5, on hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. And that's the pattern that we see all the way through Acts that people heard, they believed, they received the Spirit and they were baptized.

[12 : 38] Baptism isn't a means to salvation, it is simply a sign of our salvation that we have come to trust in the Lord Jesus. So Paul was concerned to establish and make sure that they were actually genuinely believers in the church.

But I'm sure we're all asking the question, what about verse 6? That they spoke in tongues and prophesied. Is that not a mark of genuine conversion?

Should I be speaking in tongues? Is that not what it's about? Well, here is where I believe my Pentecostal friends and I have them and I'm good friends with them, but I think this is where they've got it wrong.

Go back to chapter 2 of Acts where we are first told of the Spirit's coming. So the Spirit has come, the disciples have been prophesying, they've been preaching, they've been telling of the great things of God and here is how Peter understands the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost in verse 32.

Chapter 2, verse 32, it says, God raised this Jesus to life and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

[14 : 15] verse 37, when the people heard this they were cut to the heart and they said to Peter and the other apostles, well what should we do? And Peter replied, repent.

Repentance there is always in connection with faith or with trust. Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The promise, that's the gift of the Spirit, is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call.

Now the promise of the Spirit, he's saying it's not just for the Jews because that's who he was speaking to there, but he also says it's for those who are far off, meaning not just for Jewish people and not just here in Jerusalem and not just for now, but for people who are Gentiles, who live far off and for those who will in time come to Christ.

People from every nation, even for people in far away and Gentile places like Ephesus. The Spirit is for all people.

[15 : 34] So when these Ephesians in chapter 19 when they received the Spirit, they did begin to speak in tongues and prophesy. It was God's unique sign, his special confirmation to these people that yes, the Spirit does come upon them.

In other words, speaking in tongues is not an essential mark of genuine conversion. Rather, through the flow of Acts we see that he is saying that yes, the Spirit is also for Gentiles, for people who are non-Jews.

They too receive the Spirit. It doesn't come at some subsequent later time. It doesn't come when we necessarily speak in tongues.

It comes at our conversion. So the true marks are trust in Jesus, receiving the Spirit, and the sign that we have done all of that is being baptized.

baptized. Now, before we move on, we need to ask ourselves the question, are we genuinely converted? Have I trusted in Jesus for myself?

[16 : 48] Have I received the Spirit? Is there evidence of his work in my life? I may say I'm a disciple, but is there evidence of the Spirit's work in my life? And if there isn't that evidence as Paul discovered with these disciples, then it has to go back a step and say, well, have you trusted in Jesus?

Well, when we do, we receive the Spirit, but maybe we have never been baptized as a sign to others, that public confirmation that yes, I have trusted, and yes, I have received the Spirit.

Have you been baptized? These are questions we need to ask, and we need to deal with. So that's the first test.

Are we genuinely converted? The second test is this. Are we committed to discipleship? Verse 8. Paul entered the synagogue and he spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.

Now, the kingdom of God is a summary term for the same message that Jesus preached to his disciples just before his return to heaven. We read that in Acts 1. And Jesus was about telling people that he was God's promised Messiah, God's chosen king, who would come to establish his loving rule, calling people to repent, and was offering the promise of restoration.

[18 : 18] And the proof that Jesus was God's king was that he was alive, that he had risen from the dead. and this was the same message that Paul began to teach.

So in verse 9 we read, but some of them became obstinate and they refused to believe and publicly maligned the way.

But Paul didn't give up on them. Rest of verse 9. So Paul left them and he took the disciples, these new believers, with him and he had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus.

You see, Paul wasn't just about conversionism, he was about discipleship. He wasn't just about wanting bums on seats and to say, oh look how many people have come to Christ.

He was wanting to train them, ordinary people, to see them committed to discipleship, to grow them in their faith. Because coming to faith in Christ was crucial, but growing in Christ was essential.

[19 : 24] So each day about mid-afternoon, when people took a rest from work, or they'd go and have their lunch, they would go down and meet Paul down at the local lecture hall of Tyrannus, and there they would begin to discuss things and talk things through about what the kingdom of God was all about.

This was perhaps the first intentional discipleship program. the believers gathering around, learning and growing and deepening in their faith. And look at the results of this discipleship, verse 10.

This went on for two years so that all the Jews and all the Greeks who lived in the province of Asia, not just in Ephesus, but in the whole province, heard the word of the Lord.

That means that these young Christians, as they were discipled, became mature, church planters. They grew in their faith and as they began to move out into the province of Asia, so all these other people began to hear the word of the Lord.

They were equipped to introduce people to Jesus and to encourage them to do the same. Now I don't think it's any different for us today. And discipleship is crucial for us as a church family.

[20 : 45] It happens formally as we meet together like this on a Sunday morning and in some sense we are doing discipleship right now as we open up the Bible and learn what God has to teach us.

But it also happens informally as we meet in our gospel communities on a Wednesday or as we meet one to one with each other. We open up the Bible together.

We gather around God's word. We want to hear what God is saying to us, to listen to it, to discuss it and to apply it to our lives. Now if we're not taking time to learn about the kingdom of God like these disciples did, then we're going to become very unhealthy.

Our Christian life is going to become sick. We're never going to mature. We're never going to grow up and we're never going to be the church that God calls us to be.

So let me ask you that question again. Are we committed to discipleship? Because a healthy church takes discipleship seriously.

[21 : 59] So that's the second test. The first one, are we genuinely converted? The second one, are we committed to discipleship? And the third one is this, are we following the authentic gospel?

Now Ephesus was a large city with lots of goings on, all kinds of religions were there, and there was all kinds of magic practices. Verse 19 tells us that because there were a number of people there who practiced sorcery, a form of magic.

magic. So the question here is, well what were the people to believe and who are we to believe? How are we to work out what is counterfeit and what is actually authentic?

And there's lots of teaching going on which we can hear from all kinds of different churches and you can turn on the television and watch the God channel and we've got to work out what's counterfeit and what's authentic.

What are we to actually believe? Well as Paul taught the gospel, God confirmed the truth of his message so that we can know this is the truth.

[23 : 13] Look at verse 11. We're told there that God did extraordinary miracles through Paul. Now we're used to miracles as we read through Acts, but we're told here that this is extraordinary, this is beyond what happened, this never happened.

And what did happen? Verse 12, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched Paul, commentators suggest that they were probably rags that he used in his workshop whenever he was doing his tent making, these rags were taken to the sick and their illnesses were cured and their evil spirits left them.

Now that is extraordinary. And it's not some kind of mind manipulation to try and trick people into coming disciples.

This was a real miracle. People were healed and evil spirits left people. So what's it all about? Well I think it's God's way of confirming that the gospel that Paul was preaching to these people was authentic, it could be believed and it was true.

In fact the following event proves the point in verse 13. There were some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits and they tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon possessed.

[24 : 49] You see there were all kinds of magic practices and religious beliefs in Ephesus and they were all claiming to be the power. They were all saying well if you follow me if you do this if you do that it's going to go well for you.

So it wasn't uncommon for people to use or to rob what seemed to be working. So they'd heard about Paul and all the things that he was doing and they thought well maybe if we kind of use the words that Paul does maybe we can do the same things.

So look at the rest of verse 13. They would say in the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches I command you to come out. seven sons of Sceva.

Well who was Sceva? Well he was a Jewish priest and his sons were all involved in it. One day the evil spirit answered them.

Jesus I know and I know about Paul but who are you? now that's frightening for them isn't it? Even the demons know what is counterfeit and what is authentic.

[25 : 57] They know who has the ultimate power. They know that it's only the risen Lord Jesus who gives the power to be able to do this. But who are you? Who are you telling me to come out?

I don't respond to you. Verse 16. Then the men who had the evil spirit jumped on them, overpowered them and gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

Well I bet that was a story that went round the town. What excuse did they give when they got home with no clothes on I wonder? Hmm? You see the name of Jesus is not magical.

It has no power. Just somebody saying Jesus is no more powerful than somebody saying Johnny. it doesn't do anything. But the person of Jesus, the risen Lord Jesus, he does have ultimate power.

He has supreme authority over all evil and he continues to exercise that power when and how he wills. Because it wasn't Paul who did the miracles.

[27 : 05] Look at verse 11. God did extraordinary miracles through Paul. and the purpose of all of these miracles was to confirm the authentic gospel that Paul preached.

You could believe the message because of what had happened but also to convince these Ephesian people who were deeply involved in magic that Jesus, the risen Jesus, has supreme power and authority.

So verse 17. When this became known to the Jews and the Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honour.

Now God may choose to do extraordinary miracles today. Who are we to stop what God does? He may choose extraordinary things to prove the authenticity of his gospel.

However, what God has already done and these miracles are also recorded for us today is evidence for us today and that's what the Uncover book Luke is all about because there's evidence there to tell us that this is all true that we can believe the authentic gospel of the risen Jesus.

[28 : 33] So here's the third test. are we following the authentic gospel or are we chasing some other kind of counterfeit? Are we running after other things?

It's not unnatural to turn on the telly to the God channel and you will find people who will say send us in your money and we'll send you this hanky or this little bit of water and you will get this happen to you and this healing and everything else and people do it.

I certainly wouldn't want to hand my hanky to anybody and nobody would want my hanky either. What is authentic? What is counterfeit? We have evidence here through the miracles recorded for us that we can believe the gospel.

And the fourth test is this. Are we practicing ongoing repentance? Now very often we think of repentance as a one-off event.

But real repentance, genuine repentance, is ongoing in our lives. Verse 18. Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds.

[29 : 55] Now I understand it here that these were genuine believers who because of what has just happened and the evidence of what they have seen have come to see that they need to go on and change things in their behaviour and in their life.

And I think that's true for all of us. When we become followers of Jesus we don't have everything sorted out all at once. It takes time. We live under Christ through and when he shows us things in our life that don't match up to Christ we change them and we deal with them and that seems to be the case here.

Verse 19. There were a number who practised sorcery and they brought their scrolls together and they burned them publicly. I think this is a sense of ongoing repentance here.

Bringing all of their lives under the rule of the risen Jesus and then changing things that need to be changed. And perhaps what marks this as real repentance and look at it here in verses 18 and 19 is the public nature of it all.

Repentance isn't always private. Look at verse 18. First they openly confessed what they had done.

[31 : 14] You see they wanted people to know that they themselves knew that they had done wrong. Other people could see that their practice was wrong but they also wanted other people to see that yes I also see in my own life that I've got it wrong.

And they owned up to it. They wanted people to see how they had turned from their evil deeds and were now committed to living a different way. They openly confessed. But more than that verse 19 those who had scrolls burned them publicly.

because repentance is so much more than just words. It's not just a case of saying sorry and that's it. Move on. Thanks very much. Well here was evidence.

Here was demonstration that what they said with their lips what they said in their minds was actually true. They went and got their scrolls, brought them publicly and then set fire to them and got rid of them.

People could see by their deliberate action that they had turned from their past lifestyle. They were turning from these practices that didn't line up to Christ.

[32 : 27] And that's what real repentance is. It's ongoing. It's confessed publicly and it is proved by action.

And let's remember real repentance is costly. Look at the rest of verse 19. when they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to 50,000 drachmas.

Now a drachma we're told is a day's wage. And from my calculation that's a combined total of 5 million euro all up in smoke. In other words, their money, their reputation, their respect, their comfort, was no substitute for the riches that they were now beginning to discover and find in Jesus Christ.

They were quite happy to put all of that to one side. All for the riches that they would find in Christ. So the question is, do we practice real repentance?

Or do we just say sorry and kind of move on and that's it? Is there any evidence, is there action that we are turning aside from these things that we need to?

[33 : 49] A healthy church needs to get into the habit of repenting well. So here are four marks or signs of a healthy church.

Genuine conversion, true discipleship, the authentic gospel, gospel, and real repentance. And look what happens when there is a healthy church, verse 20.

In this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power. People looked in on these believers, this church in Ephesus, and they could see the change that it was having in people's lives and in their families, the radical change that it was doing.

And it began to spread and began to grow in power and other people came to Christ. Paul was concerned to establish a healthy church.

And here in Carragoline we're concerned to go on growing as a healthy church. church. But we need to ask these questions again in our own lives and together to make sure that we are going the way God calls us to.

[35 : 14] Because it is essential to God's ongoing mission. If we want to see the church grow, we need a healthy church. So let's pray that God will continue to help us to be that.

Lord, our Father God, we ask that you would give us grace, that you would empower us with your Spirit, that you would go on changing us and transforming us so that each day when we meet together formally like this or informally during the week, that we would grow as your disciples, filled with your Spirit, following the one true gospel, repenting and confessing to one another, and making those radical changes that we need to in our lives.

We ask for your grace, that we would go on being healthy. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Well, let's sing together as we seek to apply this and I guess to sing some of these truths into our lives.

Let your kingdom come, let your will be done, so that everyone might know your name.
Let's stand together as we sing this. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.