

Acts 18:1-11

God speaks directly to Paul, encouraging him to remain in Corinth despite his frustrations, because God apparently has many people to redeem there (v. 10). In the face of opposition, God steps in with faithful love to strengthen Paul's resolve. God promises (1) protection: despite the danger of Paul's opponents, God will ensure that they do not harm him; and (2) presence: God himself will be with Paul so that he need not doubt whether the hostility he experiences reflects God's displeasure.

Christ offers believers both of these promises. We are protected from the wrath of God through his death as our substitute. We also possess the promise of God's presence through the Holy Spirit as we partner in his mission (Matt. 28:18–20; John 14:18, 27). Knowing that God himself dwells within us allows us to press forward through adversity. It is God's presence ("I am with you"; Acts 18:10) that not only energizes believers but protects them in the midst of fear, anxiety, and doubt. This is a recurring theme in Scripture: God's presence casts out fear.

Acts 18:27

Apollos helped "those who through grace had believed." Belief is not something humans can manufacture; salvation, including faith, is completely the work of God's grace (Eph. 2:8–9). We are saved by grace, not by anything we have done. Salvation is completely a gift of God. We have done nothing to bring it about that could lead us to boast. And yet it is nearly impossible not to boast in the radical love of God when we grasp this reality.

Acts 19 - The Gospel in Ephesus

Apollos and some Ephesians had become followers of John the Baptist and had received his baptism. They knew that John pointed beyond himself to Jesus. They apparently knew of Jesus' life and ministry, and his death and resurrection, but not about the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost and its significance for the new era. These believers were in a salvation-history "time-warp," as if they were still in Acts 1, before the unfolding of redemptive history at Pentecost. Their experience of tongues (19:6) served as the witness to the Ephesian believers themselves of the gift of the Spirit that transferred them as a group from the old era to the new one in which they should be living.

In Acts 2, Jewish believers are filled with the Holy Spirit. In Acts 8, Samaritans are filled with the Spirit after they believe the gospel preached by Philip. In Acts 10 and 11, Peter preaches to Gentiles, who believe and are filled with the Spirit. Here in Acts 19, Paul meets some followers of John the Baptist who didn't even know all that Jesus did and taught. So they believe and are filled (see earlier notes on 3:11–26 and 8:14–17). In this progression we see the ever-expanding scope of the gospel. God's mercy is poured out deep and wide. The Spirit's ministry is expansive, just as Jesus' ministry was—including those who previously were excluded or uninformed. The gospel-centered focus of Acts can be pictured by expanding concentric circles: the Holy Spirit brings Jesus' good news to a small group of disciples, to Jews, to Samaritans, to Gentiles, and to the entire world (see earlier notes on 1:1–11; 2:1–13; 10:1–48). clean up his life. They do not exhort him to forsake any particular sin. They do not tell him to do anything. Rather: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household" (v. 31). Trusting faith in Christ, apart from

anything we bring to the table, is all that is required to be saved from what we rightly deserve: condemnation and hell. This is the promise of grace to us, as individuals, and it extends to our households as well.

Acts 20:1-16

This narrative should call us to the power of the gospel and the preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. Too often, churches manipulate narratives like that of Acts 20 to build a ministry around healing and miracles. Paul, however, focused on the proclamation of the gospel. The word of God stood as the centerpiece of Paul's ministry. This was not a miracle service interrupted by a word of preaching. This was preaching interrupted by a miracle. The true miracle, though, flows from the power of the gospel itself to raise spiritually dead men and women to eternal life. Though no Christian today should expect to experience what Eutychus did, every Christian will experience more than he did. One day, Christ will raise us all up from the grave, and on that day we will be brought into an eternal life. Christians today need not give up on nor doubt the power of the preached Word. The world feels the pangs of sin and suffers under the grip of Satan. The power of God for salvation, however, resounds through the preaching of his word. The preached word, by God's grace, breaks the chains, lifts the veil, and sets the captive free.

Questions for Group Discussion

1. What are some things you're afraid of when it comes to mission? How does that fear tend to obscure the reality of God's sovereignty and goodness in your life? How does the Lord's encouragement to Paul in Acts 18:9-10 comfort you today?
2. What does Apollos' response to correction teach you about receiving rebukes? Why is it a good thing to have people around you who are willing to correct you?
3. Is there anyone for whom you could serve as a Priscilla or an Aquila? How? What would hold you back from doing that?
4. What can you learn from Paul's model of engaging with the disciples he discovers in Ephesus and how might that shape your own approach to speaking with those you know who are theologically confused?
5. What do the Ephesian converts show us about repentance? Is this what repentance looks like in your life?