

Sermon: Playing at Religion Will Hurt You!

Text: Acts 19:1-20 (ESV)

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Introduction: I remember going back to Lincoln Christian College in May of 1985. It had been over 14 years since I had been on campus. Do you realize what changes in 14 years? Trees had grown. Music had changed; I did not know most of the music. The college kids were singing songs I had never heard. People were hugging each other in worship in the chapel for the slightest of reasons. I thought - probably hormones.

Professors at the college (former students with me in the 60's) were my age. Students in I.D.S. (Inter-disciplinary Studies) looked blank when we mentioned words like Vietnam, hippie, Simon & Garfunkel. One time we were playing Taboo (a word game). The word the people had to guess was "Sputnik." How many of you under thirty, know what Sputnik was?

Things had changed in the first century, too. It had been almost thirty years since John the Baptist had been beheaded, and Pentecost when the Church began, BUT still there were people who followed the teaching of John. They had not heard about how the Church had been started with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and 3000 people had accepted Christ and been baptized that first day of the Church.

Acts 19:1-10 (ESV) ¹ And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. ² And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." ³ And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." ⁴ And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. ⁷ There were about twelve men in all. ⁸ And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. ⁹ But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

These disciples in **verse 2** said they “had not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” I am sure they were a little embarrassed, but they soon recovered and responded to the gospel message by being REBAPTIZED. This is the only account of what might be described as “rebaptism” in the NT. I have rebaptized people before, but generally a reading of **I John 1** solves that perceived need for some.

I John 1:8-10 (ESV) 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

I run into many people who have never been immersed because they have never been taught correctly. In Owen Crouch’s book - *World Conquest*, a commentary on the book of Acts, he makes this insightful comment: You may remember from last week’s sermon: “To obey new knowledge is no reflection on past beliefs.”

Paul did not make fun, ridicule or condemn these disciples. He merely shared the gospel and what Jesus had clearly taught his apostles.

Religion and one’s relationship with Jesus is a difficult thing to understand without help sometimes. Christianity and Christ can only be understood by knowing God’s Word, the Bible. There is no substitute for this discipline.

I want to pose three questions to see if you are “playing at religion.”

I. How Did You Receive The Holy Spirit?

A. You cannot be a Christian without the Holy Spirit.

The cross, the resurrection, and the Holy Spirit being given to believers is unique to Christianity from all the religions of the world. And a Christian without God’s Spirit is a contradiction in terms. There is no such person.

There is never a case in the NT where a person is described as a Christian or member of the Church (Catholic) without being baptized or having received the Holy Spirit. **Verse 5** comes before **verse 6**.

These disciples (literally “learners”) were baptized in water and then after the laying on of hands they spoke in tongues (languages or ecstatic?) and prophesied. Tongues at Pentecost were used for transmission of the gospel. Tongues elsewhere in the NT seem to be a language of prayer or praise that requires interpretation and is controlled or directed by the Holy Spirit. This was an unique experience in the NT record and should not be viewed as ordinary or typical. This was for the benefit of the Church so they would know to accept these followers of John.

B. The NT pattern is the Holy Spirit is received when a person is baptized.

Martin E. Marty, certainly no proponent of baptism by immersion, makes this comment regarding its practice in his book entitled “Baptism:” This almost sounds like a post on Facebook by *Babylon Bee*.

“Nevertheless, the trend through the centuries has been away from the early understanding which involved relishing, drowning in, and enjoying the water of life. The baptismal river became a pool; the pool became a well or cistern; the cistern became a barrel; the barrel became a font; the font became a birdbath; the birdbath became a bowl; the bowl became a finger bowl. If the trend continues - perhaps it is not irreverent to ask - shall we soon be experiencing the waters, the Flood, the Red Sea, the Jordan, the water of life in the miniscule antiseptic of an aerator, an atomizer, or a humidifier?

If so, many of us were rebaptized this last week with the rain on Monday. Robert Schuller once told how he baptized someone with a Diet Coke (come on now!!!)

Remember again that baptism that is confined to just water though is not baptism. If it were, we would push people into swimming pools and rivers to save them (whether they could swim or not.) We need to be careful that everyone who submits himself to Christ in baptism understands the cost of following a Lord that wants denial and sacrifice from his disciples. Real baptism is taken up in the act of putting on Christ as it says in Paul’s letter to the Galatians. **Galatians 3:27 (ESV)** *27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on (have clothed yourselves with, NIV) Christ.*

II. Does It Matter How You Are Baptized?

A. You must be baptized into Jesus.

**What is the difference between John's baptism and baptism into Christ?
Both require repentance. Both were for the forgiveness of sin.**

F.F. Bruce even says, "John's baptism plus the receiving of the Spirit conveyed all that Christian baptism could have conveyed." BUT Bruce is wrong here!

The baptism Jesus offers comes *after* his death and resurrection with a promise of eternal life, and His Spirit is given to help us in this life until we can see Jesus face to face (the thief on the cross argument for no baptism is faulty in that Jesus hadn't died yet).

Is baptism an act of God or an act of man? YES!

**Is anyone saved by works? NO! Yet neither are you saved by doing NOTHING!
We must respond (that is an action, i.e. doing something, on our part) in faith and James clearly says that faith without works is of no value. (DEAD).**

Maybe as to when -

B. There needs to be instruction first (or before baptism).

Again in every conversion account in the NT there is instruction about the Gospel before there is baptism, not the reverse as it is practiced by some today. Paul did not instruct these disciples about the Holy Spirit, but told them about Jesus. They needed to have faith in Jesus - not the Holy Spirit.

Many people have been told things that are simply untrue - most not intentionally so, BUT e.g. in years past people said you put oil on sunburn, eat the four basic food groups (including eggs, red meat, butter, cheese). Today you would wonder if they were trying to kill you - unless you are on a Keto diet.

There will always be those who misunderstand the Christian life because they rely on what others have told them rather than reading the Bible for themselves. If you get this wrong, it is certainly more serious than choosing the wrong diet.

Before anyone should be baptized into Jesus Christ

C. You must believe in Jesus. - have faith, trust

Without faith we know that it is impossible to please God. We must believe in Jesus because there is no other name under heaven by which a person can be saved. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." ([John 14:6 ESV](#))

III. Can You Act Like A Christian Without Being One?

Yes, of course.

A. Just saying the right words is not enough.

It must have been obvious that these disciples in our text had not received the Holy Spirit by something they said and or did. We also know people who claim the name of Christ, but give themselves away by their lifestyles.

The seven sons of Sceva were saying the same words trying to mimic what they heard the apostle Paul say, BUT there was a huge difference. They did not have a relationship with God.

Acts 19:11-16 (ESV) ¹¹ And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, ¹² so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. ¹³ Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.” ¹⁴ Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. ¹⁵ But the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?” ¹⁶ And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

There is danger in copying behavior and words without understanding. e.g. diving off cliffs and yelling “Geronimo” because that was yelled by the last successful diver could lead to disaster, if you don’t understand to what you are committing.

B. Confession though is a part of our accepting the Lordship of Jesus.

Even though we as Christians have God’s Spirit, God has not taken away our free will. Christians still sin and get involved in activities that do not honor God.

Acts 19:18-20 (ESV) ¹⁸ Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. ¹⁹ And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. ²⁰ So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

Here we have Christians, members of the Church, who were convicted by God's Spirit, and they responded by destroying the things that were hurting their relationship with God. These scrolls had magical spells and incantations on them. Ephesus was known for this type of sorcery and literature (the *Ephesian Letters* they were called). The text says that they were worth 50,000 drachmas (a drachma was a day's wage equivalent - if only \$100./day, that would be 5 million dollars in today's money). That must have been some bonfire in that town of 200,000 people.

Some immoral, ungodly practices in the Ephesian culture were so pervasive that Christians were affected. It is true today. The Church many times is more of a composite and picture of the world than it is Christ's Body. We must be different to make a difference in our world. WE must be holy.

Conclusion: We cannot just ACT right and talk right; we need to BE right!

Acts 19:17 (ESV) ¹⁷ And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled.

If you are not a Christian, if you have never obeyed God in Christian baptism by being immersed in water for the forgiveness of sin, **Would you?**

God does not want you to fear Him in a way that would paralyze, BUT in a way that would free you to be his child. Do you want to be a part of God's family?

Practicing religion without true faith in God will put you in jeopardy eternally. It gives a person a false sense of security. It is the difference between "KNOW HOW" and "KNOWING GOD." Do not settle for the appearance of a relationship with God without substance. The Bible is clear as to how you need to respond.