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Using God or Used By God

Acts 19:11-20

Introduction

1. Each of you here today who wear the name Christian are on a journey, the most important one of your life.
2. It is our heavenward journey because as the apostle Paul wrote to those Christians in Philippi, “our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (*Philippians 3:20*).
3. As we await the return of our Lord, I hope that each of us has the same attitude toward our journey as did Paul in this same letter (cf. *Philippians 3:13-14*).

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“Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”
(*Philippians 3:13-14*, NASB95)

4. It is important that, as we continue our journey, we seek to be used by God in His service.
5. Sadly, as we have seen in our reading this morning there were those in Ephesus who chose not so much to be used by God as to use God.
6. In our lesson this morning, I want us to see the difference between the two so that we may wisely choose a course in life which allows God to use us faithfully in His service.
7. Briefly summarize the text before proceeding.

[Having briefly summarized our text, I would like for us to consider this morning that . . .]

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I. We Seek To Use God When We . . .

A. STRIVE TO PROFIT FROM HIS POWER

“God was performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul,” (Acts 19:11, NASB95)

1. Luke begins by telling us that the miracles which God was performing by the hands of Paul were “extraordinary (special, KJV; unusual, NKJV).”
2. People were “borrowing” the “handkerchiefs (i.e. sweat rags) or aprons” which Paul used in his work each day — remember, Paul supported himself by making tents (working with leather).
3. When someone carried one of his handkerchiefs or an apron to individuals who were sick, “the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out” (v. 12).
 - a. In his gospel, Luke tells us that during Jesus’ ministry “all the people were trying to touch Him, for power was coming from Him and healing them all” (Luke 6:19).
 - b. He also tells us of the woman who came up behind Jesus “and touched the fringe of His cloak, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped” (Luke 8:44).
 - c. Luke also tells us that in the early days of the church in Jerusalem, people “carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on any one of them” (Acts 5:15).
 - d. He adds in the next verse, “they were all being healed” (Acts 5:16).
4. In none of these instances here in Ephesus did Paul seek to profit from those who were made well.
8. However, there are those today who will advertise a specially blessed handkerchief for a nominal fee which, if prayerfully applied will bring

healing to a sick individual.

- Those who look to profit from such things are seeking to use God.

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B. EXPLOIT GOD'S WORD FOR PRAGMATIC PURPOSES

"But also some of the Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place, attempted to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches."" (Acts 19:13, NASB95)

1. In Ephesus there were some "Jewish exorcists" who traveled around seeking to make a profit by supposedly casting "evil spirits" out of those who were afflicted.
 - a. In Acts 8:9-11, Philip encountered a magician in Samaria whose name was Simon.
 - b. In Acts 13:6, Paul and Barnabas found a Jewish false prophet on the island of Cyprus known as Bar-Jesus (Elymas) who was also a magician.
2. Now, these "Jewish exorcists" here in Ephesus, had no doubt seen Paul cast out an evil spirit, as he had done with the young girl in Philippi.
3. On that occasion, he had said to her, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her!" (Acts 16:18).
4. These Jewish exorcists thought they could accomplish the same results by using a similar formula for their own purposes — "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches" (v. 13).
5. Luke tells us about a "Jewish chief priest" whose name was "Sceva".
6. This man had seven sons who had seen these Jewish exorcists attempting to cast out evil spirits.
7. They decided to utilize the same formula as the Jewish exorcists, thinking, if it worked for Paul, surely it will work for us.
8. However, when they tried this, the evil spirit responded to them and said,

“Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?” (*Acts 19:15, ESV*).

a. Two different words are used here for knowledge:

1) “Jesus I know” (*ginōskō*) — to know from experience

2) “Paul, I recognize” (*epistamai*) — to be acquainted with

b. The evil spirit recognized Paul because God’s Spirit dwelt within him.

c. However, the evil spirit neither knew nor recognized Sceva’s seven sons because God’s Spirit did not dwell within them.

9. These men did not truly know God, Christ, nor the Word of Christ.

10. The question for each of us today is this:

Do Satan and his angels know us because we are people who are filled with God’s Spirit (*Ephesians 5:18*) and immersed in His Word (*Colossians 3:16*; *Ephesians 6:17*).

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11. Later, Paul would write to Timothy, who, by the way, was in Ephesus, and say, “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron . . .” (*1 Timothy 4:1-2*).

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12. In his second letter to Timothy, he again exhorted the young evangelist to “preach the word” and then warned, “for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths” (*2 Timothy 4:2, 3-4*).

❑ What works is not always what is true or right — to substitute that for God’s Word is to seek to use God for our purposes.

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II. We Seek To Be Used By God When We . . .

A. SERVE HIM FAITHFULLY AS PEOPLE OF INTEGRITY

1. Unlike the seven sons of Sceva, Paul did not seek to use the power of God for his own personal gain.
2. While he had a legitimate right to be supported through his preaching of the gospel, he labored at his trade of making tents (leather working) (*Acts 20:34*).
3. Paul did not try to promote the use of his "handkerchiefs" and "aprons" telling people their loved ones would be healed if they utilized these in faith.
4. Nor did he attempt profit from their use.
5. Because he was a man of integrity he allowed people to take them and utilize them for the benefit of others, even as Jesus allowed people to touch Him believing they would be made well, which of course did happen.
6. What are we to take from his example this morning?
7. It is our honest labor in the cause of the gospel which God blesses.
8. This was Paul's constant message through his own example:

"Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." (*Colossians 3:17, NASB95*)

"Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men," (*Colossians 3:23, NASB95*)

"Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (*1 Corinthians 10:31, NASB95*)

9. Everything which Paul did and the way in which he did it was for the glory of God — he sought nothing for himself.
10. Our desire, like Paul's, should always be that . . .
 - a. "the name of the Lord Jesus" is being magnified (*Acts 19:17*).
 - b. "the word of the Lord" grows mightily and prevails (*Acts 19:20*).

- c. whether we live or die, it will be Christ who is always exalted in our body (*Philippians 1:20*).

Slide 8**B. IN WHOLEHEARTED REPENTANCE DEMONSTRATE OUR FAITH**

- 1. Luke records for us that “many of those who had believed kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices” (*Acts 19:18*).
- 2. It seems that these Christians had held onto their magic books and were continuing to practice their magic. Why?
 - a. Magic had been a part of their lives since before their obedience to Christ.
 - b. Until this incident with the sons of Sceva, these new Christians did not necessarily consider their former behavior to be that evil.
- 3. However, once they understood that reverence for the name of Jesus meant the avoidance with the occult and anything else connected with demons, they . . .
 - a. Came forward “confessing and disclosing their practices” (v. 18)
 - b. “Brought their books together and began burning them in the sight of everyone” (v. 19).
- 4. Paul didn’t give any command regarding their separation from the occult.
- 5. They decided on their own to do this based upon their understanding of God’s will for their lives.
- 6. The estimated cost of the books which they burned was “fifty thousand pieces of silver” — almost 160 years of income for the average person.
- 7. These people in Ephesus burned up a tremendous amount of personal wealth.
- 6. What does this say to us here today?
- 7. It is that our desire to follow Christ requires wholehearted repentance — giving up our old sinful practices and lifestyles:
 - a. According to a report from the Pew Research Center, released May 21,

2025, nearly one-third of American adults — 30% — consult occult practices such as astrology, tarot cards or fortune tellers at least once a year.

- b. The number of people who self-identify as Witches has grown from 8,000 in 1990 to over a million in the last few years.

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- 8. Before the Israelites entered the promised land, Moses commanded them, “There shall not be found among you anyone . . . who uses divination . . . who practices witchcraft, or . . . who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead” (Deuteronomy 18:10-11, NASB95).
 - ❑ What is it that following our Lord will require you to give up, get rid of, or remove from your life?

Slide 10**C. FAITHFULLY PROCLAIM GOD'S WORD**

- 1. The Holy Spirit does not influence Luke to include this story to impress us with all the miracles that were going on in Ephesus.
- 2. No, I believe it is to emphasize the power which the Word of God was having in that great city.
- 3. When Paul was forced to withdraw from the synagogue to the school of Tyrannus, it wasn't the performance of miracles he focused upon, but the teaching of “the word of the Lord” (v. 10).
- 4. Someone has estimated that in the two years Paul spent teaching in the school, he spent in excess of 2,500 hours sharing the truths of God's Word.
- 5. What happened as a result? Luke states that “all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (v. 10).
- 6. Our text today concludes with these words, “So the word of the Lord was growing mightily and prevailing” (v. 20).
- 7. God's desire for us today is that we continue to faithfully proclaim His word.
- 8. It is through the sharing of God's Word that souls are saved, and God's

kingdom grows.

- God will use us in ways beyond our imagination if we will but proclaim His Word.

Conclusion

1. God has placed a choice before us . . .
 - a. We may attempt to use Him for our own selfish purposes — a choice in which we will ultimately fail.
 - b. Or, we can seek to be used by God — a choice which will result in His glory and our eternal salvation.

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2. Some years ago I ran across a person's personal blog in which the individual had put this statement concerning her life,

"When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left, and could say, 'I used everything you gave me.'"

3. How about you, when you stand before our Lord at the last day, what do you most desire? Is it to have been used by Him to the fullest extent possible to accomplish His will.
4. If you have . . .
 - a. Served Him gladly in the integrity of your heart
 - b. Come before Him in wholehearted repentance, casting aside all that has kept you from faith service
 - c. Continued to faithfully proclaim His truth

. . . then you will have been used by God for a cause greater than yourself.
5. Today, let us go forth from this building with a great mission before us to serve the great God of heaven with all the strength He gives us.