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## When Christ is Magnified and Believers Consecrated - God's Word Prevails



Part 43 (070805AM)

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### What Does a Grace-Energized Church Look Like?

A grace-energized church is where believers are empowered by God to magnify Christ, when God's Word is prevailing in and through their lives, and they are willing to consecrate their lives and rid themselves of anything that hinders or displeases God.

As you open in your Bibles, we will examine one of the most amazing chapters in the Bible, Acts 19. In this chapter we find a powerful grace-energized church that God used, and where Christ's glory is supreme.

This chapter is the biography of the saints at Ephesus, a phenomenal grace-energized church, and in that account we find ***the timeless keys to a church God can use greatly***.

God's Word explains to us what makes Christ's church powerful in any culture. It is when:

- ***God's Son is magnified, and***
- ***God's People are consecrated, then***
- ***God's Word prevailed.***

Jesus was magnified and God's Word prevailed in this group of consecrated people in the New Testament church at Ephesus. What a combination to have for the Lord in any generation. That powerful ministry was the result of a purged and obedient local church.

The grace-energized saints of Ephesus overcame the same pressures facing us as believers today: a pleasure seeking culture, a mind-assaulting media, and a materialism-dominated way of life.

God's Word always has an answer for how to walk in the Spirit, abide in Christ, and see Christ's church prevail in an ever darkening world. The struggle is always against our flesh and the Devil; and resisting [\[1\]](#)[\[1\]](#) both is what we are charged with as an imperative from God's Word.

In this church we see grace-energized saints, walking in the power of God's Spirit. To study this model church at Ephesus is to see...

### When God's Word Prevailed in Dark Ephesus

Acts 19 records one of the greatest revivals in Biblical history. Paul went to the godless heart of the Eastern Roman Empire called Ephesus. There he confronted the evils of culture that godlessness begets: materialism, pride, occultism, and sensuality—each of which is still a constant enemy of our walk with Christ.

The kingdom of darkness was left shaken to the core, confused and fighting against itself. Then, God called out a group of believers that would form one of the greatest churches of the New Testament era. By their zenith they numbered as many as 50,000 and were the home church of Paul, Mary, John, and Timothy.

Before we read through Acts 19 for a look at this incredible revival that swept through the church at Ephesus, remember the facts about this place.

Ephesus was a coastal seaport along the commercial trade route linking east to west. For hundreds of years the worship of Diana (or Artemis) had made Ephesus a thriving, and safe commercial center. Known as the "Treasure House of Asia" the city of Ephesus also became a center for materialism and ambition.

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The Temple dedicated to Diana was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. A forest of 127 bejeweled and carved sixty foot high marble pillars rose around the perimeter; and a statue of a sex goddess, worshipped by unbridled immorality was at the center of everything done in that city. The worship of Artemis was the worship of the desires of the flesh to their fullest.

Hundreds of prostitutes were always on the grounds to promote this unrestrained indulgence of the flesh. Ephesus was a magnet for not just the sexually enslaved; it was also the center of the promotion of the black arts, witchcraft, superstition, and all the powers of Satan. It was like a cesspool where everything occultic was collected. Ephesus became the watering hole where every charlatan, medium, palm-reader, spiritist, magician, and witch felt right at home. That helps us understand why Paul would tell these Ephesians that there was so much more than the physical world to contend with.

We recall his words in [Ephesians 6:12](#).

*For we do not wrestle [\[2\]\[2\]\[2\]](#) against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

So in this very dark, very worldly, very alluring place of sin—Christ's church was born. And [Acts 19:8-20](#) records that amazing birth. Please stand with me and listen to what God can do when His Son is magnified, His Word unleashed, and His children are consecrated for His Glory.

## Facing the Darkness ([Acts 19:8-10](#))

In [Acts 19:8-10](#) we find the plan God laid on Paul's heart for reaching a society so much like ours. Paul faced off against the powers of darkness in Ephesus by one of the longest recorded times he ever got to spend teaching God's Word in a synagogue. Paul spent three months in intense Bible teaching right there in the shadow of Diana's Temple of Darkness. Look how Luke describes that time in [Acts 19:8-10](#).

*[Acts 19:8-10](#) And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, [reasoning\[3\]\[3\]](#) and [persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God](#). 9 But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. 10 And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.*

Paul rented a lecture hall from a "Tyrannus" and using the customary lunch and siesta time observed each day in the Roman Empire [\[4\]\[4\]\[4\]](#).

Paul didn't want to just be another religious peddler, living off the hardworking people of Ephesus. He wanted nothing to stand in the way of his message so he labored night and day with his own hands, and taught any and all who would come on the afternoon break time.

Look at the next verse. Paul did this daily for two years. That means Paul invested as much as five hours a day for 24 months. With the Sabbath off for rest, that means Paul invested over three thousand hours in teaching into the church at Ephesus. That is equivalent to thirty-years of morning and evening sermons at this church all packed into two years. Paul gave them a lifetime of learning in a very short time.

Listen to the results of this extensive and focused teaching time shedding Christ's light in that sin-darkened culture. I like to describe this as--

## Penetrating the Darkness ([Acts 19:11-12](#))

*[Acts 19:11-12](#) Now God worked unusual miracles [\[5\]\[5\]\[5\]](#) by the hands of Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.*

We already saw in v. 10 that Luke said that "all" who dwelt in the Roman province of Asia (which is roughly modern day Turkey) were exposed to God's Word. In the area surrounding Ephesus there are the famous seven churches that Jesus wrote to in Revelation. It is very possible that each of them were a by-product of this extensive and intensive proclamation of God's Word.

The word "handkerchiefs" is actual the word for the sweat rags of the workshop [\[6\]\[6\]\[6\]](#). The word "aprons" is the word for the leather workers apron. There in the hot and humid seaside tent-makers quarters, the rags that Paul used to wipe his face as he labored to work to pay his way and the way of those who were with him—when taken from that shop by those who wanted him to help their loved ones, healed them. That is unusual. God honored Paul's message, his hard work, and most of all his assault on the realm of Satan's hold over these enslaved and sin-darkened people.

God looks for men and women to use who are willing to work unhindered by the sacrifice, laboring with an undivided heart, proclaiming an undiluted message, investing even in a humble occupation—all to make the Gospel of Christ known. This level of commitment was not new to Paul. [\[7\]\[7\]\[7\]](#)

Paul sewed tents in the morning, taught the Bible all afternoon, disciplined fellow tent makers into the evening, went on visitation, prayed through sleepless nights and wrestled with the Devil. All that to get the Gospel out, and see a church born in the center of Satan's lands of darkness. What a wonderful, inspiring servant of the Lord Paul must have been.

And as always happens: light attracts bugs. The powerful work of God was so amazing that Satan sent some bugs to hinder that work in Acts 19, they began--

## Faking the Light ([Acts 19:13-16](#))

In the midst of these "unusual" miracles a clever group opportunists wanted to get in on the action and started 'selling' the power of God. But God powerfully silenced their mockery. [\[8\]\[8\]\[8\]](#)

This event and the powerful outpouring of God's power deeply penetrated the hearts of the believers. They saw clearly that God was Living and True and that they as His children must be—

## Renouncing the Darkness (Acts 19:17-20)

This was the turning point. The power of darkness was broken. Satan's house was divided. Christ triumphantly opened the door to great ministry through this church.

*Acts 19:17-18 This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. 18 And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. 19 Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20 So **the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.***

The most remarkable facet of Paul's ministry to this church is that when Paul taught the Ephesian believers about the strategies of Satan, they collected and burned all of the objects associated with demonic and satanic contact.

The level of their desire to repent and follow the Lord was seen in this costly choice to rid their lives of anything that displeased Him. Their example recorded by God in His Word should stir us to ask, "Have we likewise carefully purged out of our lives anything that displeases the Lord?"

As you look back at v. 19, doesn't that verse amaze you? What did God lead Paul to do to prompt such a huge response in public with such great sacrifice involved?

God's Word records exactly what Paul told them that made them respond so dramatically to the evil around them. What Paul taught made them go home, search out, gather and BURN all of their expensive media.

Aren't you glad that the Holy Spirit has captured for each of us Paul's message that those saints heard and responded to? It is in the Epistle to the Ephesians, where Paul wrote down the messages God wanted them to remember and us to hear with them. Turn with me to [Ephesians 4:22-24](#), and remember again that we are called to—

## A Life-style of Shedding the Old Life (Ephesians 4:22-24)

The heart of the message Paul taught them is in [Ephesians 4:22-24](#). That same message of Christ's Lordship must fill our lives, leading to the removal of any part of our lives that displeases God. There are three clear choices we must make! Look again with me at [Ephesians 4:22-24](#):

*that you **put off**, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, 23 and **be renewed** in the spirit of your mind, 24 and that you **put on** the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*

First, Paul is asking believers **to start a life-style of grace-energized shedding**. This is "putting off" old habits like old clothes are so comfortable and fit us so well, that we often forget that we even have them on again—until the Spirit of God convicts us. Paul is reminding us that those who will live a life holy to the Lord must repeatedly put off the old ways.

If we struggle with anger, anger must be shed daily; and if we struggle with pride, pride must daily be shed. This is also the choice we must make for lust, greed, fear and any other byproducts of our flesh. Often believers fail to grow in their spiritual lives because they don't understand the life-long need to shed or "put off" our old sins on a daily basis.

Second, in v. 23 Paul is asking them **to start a life-style of grace-energized thinking**. Choices to put off old ways flow from our renewed minds. Just as [Romans 12:2](#) says we are "transformed by the renewing of our minds". When we think godly, we behave godly; or when we believe right, we behave right.

God's plan for our minds always starts with us personally reading and studying His Word. Then from that flows our personal request to God's Spirit, asking Him to renew our minds. As we prayerfully read we have in our minds God's thoughts. As we submit to God's desires through His Word—He infuses His mind into ours. Paul said that we can have the mind of Christ by this constant renewal process. A grace-energized mind comes as believers regularly, hopefully daily get God's Word into their hearts and minds.

A simple goal would be to listen to God's voice all the way through His Word once each year. This is an imperative for us, reading the Bible expectantly and asking God to speak to us by His Spirit each day in His Word.

Lastly, in v. 24 Paul is asking them **to start a life-style of grace-energized wearing**. This is the putting on: "and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (v. 24). God makes it clear that it is not enough to merely put off old fleshly habits, they must be replaced with the newness of Christ in wearing His love, wearing His peace, etc. ([Galatians 5:22](#)). If I lose my temper with my wife or children, and repent and put it off—that is not enough unless I also put on Christ's love and patience also! [\[9\]\[9\]\[9\]](#)

God is at work in us His children, and energized by His grace we must work at living out this new life [Phil. 2:12-13](#)). Our daily task is getting dressed in our divine clothes—spiritually speaking clothes do make the man, and the woman.

One final point that is perhaps the most important one of all for each of us: when the church cleans house, when believers renounce hidden sins, when there is a banishment of all hypocrisy and pretense, and genuine holiness begins to permeate Christ's church—*unbelievers become attracted to this new way of life.*

The power of the early church was simply genuine holiness. Energized by grace they magnified

Christ, God's Word prevailed in them, and they lived consecrated lives. The Spirit of God moved unhindered, flowed unquenched and God got all the glory. No one competed for the credit, no one sought to be in control. God reigned, the Spirit moved, and Christ was magnified. They had caught the message of [Ephesians 4:22-24](#). They put off, renewed, and put on the new—just as God told them to do. The choice is still ours.

- We must daily strip off any return of the rotting garments of the old life.
- We must personally reject any hint of sensuality, selfishness, pride, materialism, and bitterness in our lives.
- We must eat God's Word and ask for renewed minds by His Spirit.
- We must work out our own salvation by choosing to do the disciplines that will develop a Biblical mind.
- We must put on and wear our new, shining garments of light each day, and live the new us we became in Christ.

God's Word explains to us what makes Christ's church powerful in any culture. It is when:

- **God's Son is magnified, and**
- **God's People are consecrated, then**
- **God's Word prevailed.**

Jesus was magnified and God's Word prevailed in this group of consecrated people in the New Testament church at Ephesus. What a combination to have for the Lord in any generation. That powerful ministry was the result of a purged and obedient local church.

One dear pastor wrote these words:

*"What would be burned today if the Spirit's conviction swept this church?"*

*I think some DVD's, magazines, and videos would be quietly removed from out-of-the-way desk drawers or certain novels from the family bookshelves.*

*Perhaps some television shows, movies, web sites, radio stations, and video games would be boycotted.*

*Some people would ask others to pray that they would be set free from whatever is dragging them down.*

*And many would come to Christ for forgiveness of sin and deliverance from the eternal wrath of God<sup>[10]</sup>[10][10]*".

[1][1][1] A few months back we studied our spiritual immune system that is laid out in Scripture as having three factors: **spiritual health** (eating God's Word in [Hebrews 5: 13-14](#), [Matthew 4: 4](#); plus exercising each day by walking in the Spirit in [Galatians 5: 16](#)); **spiritual armor** (understanding and uses the armor Paul commands us to use in [Ephesians 6: 10-18](#)); and **spiritual warfare** (resisting the devil and his demons in [James 4: 7](#), [1 Peter 5: 8-9](#)). If you neglect any part of your spiritual immune system—Satan and his army have a point to step up their campaign.

[2][2][2] The word "wrestle" refers to hand-to-hand combat with trickery and deception. That is Paul's description of how Satan and his hosts try to attack. Paul then lists four different designations of the spiritual world in opposition to God. Each of these words describe a different layer or rank of demons in the evil spiritual empire they serve. Satan's forces of darkness are highly structured for the most destructive purposes. Paul and Peter both name these same levels of demons ([Colossians 2: 15](#); [1 Peter 3: 22](#)).

[3][3][3] The word "reasoning" (NKJV) is the Greek word 'dialoguing'. Paul did questions and answer times, he reasoned back and forth taking the Jews from where they were, into God's Word and back to an application for their life in Ephesus. After three months of this, when the unbelievers became "hardened" and started to attack those who had believed, Paul makes a strategic shift in his methods.

[4][4][4] Usual work days went from 7 to 11 AM, then lunch and rest from 11AM-4 PM, and back to work from 4-9 PM. The Western Text actually says in the Greek text at this place 'from the fifth hour to the tenth'. From Paul's other writing we can assume that he worked at his tent-making business each morning, dialogued each day during the time off people had, and then returned to the shop to work from 4-9PM. If you look over at [Acts 20: 34](#) note what Paul reminded the church about his work ethic: [Acts 20: 34](#) "Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.

[5][5][5] Next, Luke records that "unusual miracles" took place. That is interesting because miracles in and of themselves are unusual, but these were extraordinary attestations by God of His Kingdom overcoming the reign of darkness in that whole area. Two types are noted—the hands of personal work of Paul and the power of God displayed through objects taken from Paul to the sick. Therein lies a bit of insight into the 'unusual' power displayed.

[6][6][6] Those handkerchiefs and aprons were as one commentator puts it, were: "symbols which God chose to employ in order to underscore the characteristic of the apostle which made him a channel of the power of God. In the same way, Moses' rod was a symbol. Cast on the ground, the rod became a serpent; lifted over the waters, it rolled them back. There was nothing magic about the rod itself; it was the symbol of something about Moses which God honored. So these sweatbands and trade aprons were symbols of the honest, dignified humility of heart, the servant-character which manifested and released the power of God." – Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Ephesians—The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

[7][7][7] In his first epistle to the Thessalonians he said: [1 Thessalonians 2: 9](#) For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil: for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.

[8][8][8] In the ancient world there were professional exorcists. They were magicians who had the reputation of knowing the individual names of the most powerful spirit beings. Among them were also even a group of Jewish priests who claimed to have knowledge of how to pronounce secret names of God, and thus they held special powers over the spiritual world. "So it was very natural for renegade Jewish exorcists to add Jesus' name to their incantations. But the situation was intolerable, and the Lord decided to purge the bandwagon by providing an unforgettable example. The seven sons of Sceva thought they would have another quick exorcism and an easy buck—until they intoned the name Jesus. Then the demoniac rolled his frenzied eyes and said, "I know who Jesus is, and I know who Paul is, but who do you think you are?" After that, all they remembered were some rights and lefts, the door opening, and streaking madly for cover! Oh, how the church probably loved to tell that story!" Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Ephesians—The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

[9][9][9] All of this is through God's grace. Works have no place in obtaining salvation or in gaining merit in the Christian life. The Christian life is sola gratia, grace alone. Nevertheless, the Apostle Paul said, "continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" ([Philippians 2:12b, 13](#)). Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Ephesians—The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

[10][10][10] Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Ephesians—The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

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