

# Are You Getting Ready to Stand in the Evil Days Ahead?

Matthew 6:13b; Acts 19:19-20

Have you noticed how dark it is getting in our land these days? Sins once unspeakably bad are now badges of honor. Things God said merit endless wrath are now the goals of an entire segment of society.

How do we minister the Word of God in such dark times as these in which we live?

In Acts 19:19-20, we meet a group of people convinced that God could deliver them from the evil one. They enjoyed what may have been one of the greatest revivals in history. They also understood and heeded what God says about the unseen world of spiritual pathogens all around us every moment.

## The Unseen World

In the last hundred years we have made great strides towards understanding how dangerous germs and viruses really are. We know that even the smallest breach of our protective layer of skin can become the invasion point for deadly armies of microbes; and those germs once inside the defensive walls, can multiply into million in a matter of a few hours, overwhelming our bodies with toxins and disease.

Because of that awareness, if you were walking down an alley behind the Mall and you spotted a used syringe with a razor sharp needle filthy and stained with blood, wouldn't you be alarmed if your small child walking beside you picked it up and began poking their arm with that needle? Wouldn't any of us stop everything and keep them from such a dangerous action? Of course we would.

We respond to these situations because we are all convinced of the devastating effects those pathogens can have if they get into our bodies. Deadly disease producing germs (as in viruses and bacteria) are what we would fear that needle might get into our child's body--sickening them or even endangering their life.

This week I read an online bulletin from the renowned Mayo Clinic. These words reminded me of our Spiritual Warfare study we are walking through these past few weeks.

## We Live in a World of Germs

***... Some keep you healthy — others make you sick. Protect yourself by understanding which ones are harmless and which ones pose a threat.***

Germs were behind every fever, runny nose, ache, pain and other sign and symptom of every cold and flu you've ever had. When you're in the midst of such symptoms, you might not stop to think about the germs (microbes) that are causing them. Not all germs will harm you, but knowing more about germs — including bacteria, viruses and parasites — can increase your

chances of avoiding infection.

## **Germs: Multitudes of Unseen Invaders**

Bacteria, viruses and other infectious organisms — germs — live everywhere. You can find them in the air, on food, plants and animals, in the soil, in the water, and on just about every other surface — including your own body. These microbes range in size from microscopic single-celled organisms to parasitic worms that can grow to several feet in length.

Most of these organisms won't harm you. Your immune system protects you against a multitude of infectious agents. However, some bacteria and viruses are formidable adversaries because they're constantly mutating to breach your immune system's defenses. Often the most dangerous are the viruses.<sup>1</sup>

## **Two Relentless Wars Are Raging**

That online medical bulletin was a fascinating reminder of the real world we are called by God to live in and serve Him in, each day. The bottom line is this: there are two relentless wars waged against us each day. Both are usually unseen.

One war is physical the other war is spiritual.

The physical war involves our bodies; and the spiritual war involves our minds.

Physically, the war targets one of the most amazing systems of our bodies, the immune system. Almost always unseen, this amazing defensive system operates 24/7 warding off untold legions of deadly attackers in the form of germs that enter our bodies through cuts, scrapes, punctures of our skin, breathing air, or eating food.

Spiritually, we are likewise under continuous bombardment and attack. And one of the most amazing systems of our spiritual lives is the immune system God has also built into us in Christ.

## **Our Spiritual Immune System**

Our spiritual immune system is laid out in Scripture as having three factors:

**Spiritual Health** (eating and drinking in God's Word, plus exercising each day by walking in the Spirit);

**Spiritual Armor** (understanding and using the armor Paul commands us to use in Ephesians 6:10-18); and

**Spiritual Warfare** (resisting the devil and his demons). If you neglect any part of your spiritual immune system—Satan and his army have a point to target in their relentless campaign.

So what is the direction we get from God's Word? The armor of God and spiritual warfare are taught in the context of the city of Ephesus. When we look at the book of Acts we see that Paul served the church at Ephesus longer than any other New Testament church. His epistle or letter to the Ephesians is the chief insight into spiritual warfare. One of the key insights we get about Ephesus was their attraction to the occult (as with most of the ancient world).

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/germs/ID00002>

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

Ephesus experienced 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 daily life that godlessness begets: materialism, pride, occultism, and sensuality.

The sequence that the Spirit of God led Luke to capture this stop on Paul's Missionary Journeys is profound. The manner of Paul's attack is by extensive and in-depth teaching of God's Word. The results are worthy of our attention.

First the kingdom of darkness is left shaken to the core, confused and fighting against itself. Second, 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. In fact, Jesus wrote the church at Ephesus first in Revelation because of their zeal and fervency for him.

Finally, every detail in Acts 19 was written down for us to learn from, to see what God wants us to see as the right way to confront the wrong in our culture; and also for those of us who love Jesus—how to get right with Him, and stay right with Him.

To apply all this let's go back to where we started. 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 (Acts 19:19-20). Please stand read with me those powerful words of the Gospel's powerful entrance into Ephesus as stated in Acts 19:19-20.

Acts 19:19-20 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.

### **Pray**

## **Costly Choices to Rid Life of Anything Displeasing God**

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 any of these landing places of the devil?"

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?

Have you ever wished you knew what exactly Paul told them that made them respond so dramatically to the evil around them? What did Paul say that made them go home, search out, gather and BURN all that expensive media?

Did you know 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.

As we listen to what Paul preached, taught, and prayed for these saints—we want to empty out any part of our life that grieves, quenches, and displeases our God; and shut the door to any place for the Devil and his demons in our lives.

Satan is not interested in a head on confrontation with Christ's Church. He usually does not kick down the front door and walk in. Rather he quietly slips into unguarded areas by way

of doors left unlocked, windows left open, and any other means of establishing a beach head.

Satan and his demons are alive, awake, and at work relentlessly, tirelessly, and devastatingly 24/7 as the ultimate spiritual terrorists. Paul preached, taught, disciplined, and reasoned longer and deeper than in any other church. The response was amazing, but the message was simple. Always guard against the...

## **A Life-style of Shedding Our Old Life**

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, note that Paul describes the actions of v. 22-24 after the Ephesians had already put off the old self, their pre-salvation as life described in vv. 17-19. The work of the Cross was to wash them clean and they began as new creatures in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17). Here Paul is asking them to start ***a life-style of shedding the old life repeatedly***. 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.

## **A Life-style of Renewing Our Minds**

Next, in v. 23 Paul points to our minds and says those must change also. 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.

"This is done by reading and studying God's Word, and by asking the Holy Spirit to continue his renewing work. The Word gives us God's very thoughts, and prayerful meditation upon it will infuse his mind into ours in constant renewal. This is why every Christian should be regularly — daily — reading God's Word. This is also why it is valuable to read the Bible through once a year. It is imperative that we read the Word expectantly, praying for God to speak to us by his Holy Spirit.

Here we must keep in mind that we do not put on the new man merely by putting off the old. We need to put on love, to put on peace, to put on joy, to put on patience, etc. (cf. Galatians 5:22). For example, I may have lost my temper with my children, and I have repented and put it off. But I have not completed my responsibility unless I have also put on love and patience.

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).

God is at work in his people. But as children of grace we must work at our Christian lives. We have our part to do in dressing ourselves with the divine wardrobe, for here clothes do make the man — and the woman! <sup>2</sup>

## When Revival Comes

Back to Acts 19 for a look at this incredible revival that swept through the church at Ephesus.

First, we need to remind ourselves about the place Paul came and ministered. 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.

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. Look back at Ephesians 6:12.

For we do not wrestle 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.

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.

## Facing the Darkness

Starting back 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 in a synagogue. Paul spent three months in intense Bible teaching right there in the shadow of Diana's Temple of Darkness.

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<sup>2</sup> Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Ephesians—The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.

Acts 19:8-10 And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, **reasoning 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.

Look at v. 10. 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.

## Penetrating the Darkness

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

Acts 19:11-12 Now God worked unusual miracles 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.

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.

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.

## Unhindered, Undivided, Undiluted

God looks for men and women to greatly 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. 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.

So 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.

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.

Acts 19:13-16 Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, “We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.” 14 Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief

priest, who did so. 15 And the evil spirit answered and said, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?” 16 Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

This band of exorcists thought they could ride Paul’s success and make a name for themselves. But facing the demonized man with Jesus Name drew a painful response. “Jesus I know and Paul I know but you are not with them.” Soon they fled utterly defeated, humiliated, and powerless against the kingdom of darkness. God had shown the power of the Cross through Paul.

## **Renouncing the Darkness**

This was the turning point. The power of darkness was broken. Satan’s house was divided. Christ the triumphant was opening 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.**

This final point 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 real life.**

## **The Power of Genuine Holiness**

The power of the early church was simple, genuine holiness.

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 way 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.

One dear pastor wrote these words:

“What would be burned today if the Spirit’s conviction swept the church?

I think some magazines 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, music, 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>3</sup>”.

In Acts 19:19-20, we meet a group of people convinced that God could deliver them from the evil one. They understood and heeded what God says about the unseen world of spiritual pathogens all around us every moment. They enjoyed what may have been one of the greatest revivals in history.

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<sup>3</sup> Hughes, R. Kent, Preaching the Word: Ephesians—The Mystery of the Body of Christ, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books) 1997.