

Grace Church  
Roanoke, Virginia

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Lesson #47

ACTS  
Christ Changes Culture  
Acts 19:21-41

How have our lives changed the world we live in? God in His providence has caused each one of us to live in the western culture, and the American culture in particular. How have we changed our culture? We know that Christ not only changes lives, but Christ also changes culture. When Christ saves a man or woman, a person begins to develop a Christian world-life viewpoint, and this Christian philosophy begins to make an impact upon our atheistic, materialistic and humanistic society. Since Christ lives in us, how have we affected the world we live in? Christ changes culture so as to make a culture face Christ realistically. Christ changes culture by first changing men on the inside who begin to live for Christ and operate on a biblical morality based on absolutes. Men and women, with Christ in their lives, begin to affect society in the area of politics, law, economics, music, morality, art and even religion. Christ's philosophy is in opposition to the world's philosophy and there is often open conflict between the forces of darkness and the forces of light. Christianity is revolutionary and it is a very dangerous faith. If you do not think so, you have not yet begun to live it. Someone has said that a Christian is one who is completely fearless, continually cheerful and constantly in trouble. Let us remember it is Christ's desire that Christians should shape, mold and make an impact on culture, and that godless, humanistic culture should not mold Christians.

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2).

In the city of Ephesus, we see how Christ, through Paul and other Christians, affected a whole culture so as to make that culture face Christ realistically. Paul hit at the whole issue of religious idolatry which in turn affected the whole economic system of that pagan city.

THE STRATEGY OF PAUL - Acts 19:21, 22

Resolution (19:21)

“Now after these things were finished, . . .” – The gospel of Christ had been firmly planted in Ephesus and all of Asia Minor because Paul had spent about three years ministering in that one place. Paul's work in Ephesus was coming to a close, and God was beginning to prompt him to move on to some new pioneer mission field.

Tom Harrison shared with me that almost all the local churches in our country that are being greatly used of God have a pastor who has been with that church over 20 years. It takes time to build a solid local church.

“Paul purposed in the spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, . . .” -- Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, made some definite determinations. He planned. He strategized. Paul had a long-range and short-range plan as to how he could best carry out the Great Commission. The Apostle Paul was goal oriented; therefore he planned for the future. Paul's short-range goal was to go to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost, and on the way he would stop in Macedonia and Achaia to encourage the churches he established, and to have them take up a collection for the needy Christians in Jerusalem.

“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come. And when I arrive, whomever you may approve, I shall send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem; and if it is fitting for me to go also, they will go with me. But I shall come to you after I go through Macedonia, for I am going through Macedonia; and perhaps I shall stay with you, or even spend the winter that you may send me on my way wherever I may go. For I do not wish to see you now just in passing; for I hope to remain with you for some time, if the Lord permits. But I shall remain in Ephesus until Pentecost” (I Cor. 16:1-8).

Individual Christians and local churches should make plans, set goals, for the future. We should sit down and plan strategy as to how we can actively conform to Christ and how our local church can have a wider ministry in reaching our neighborhood, city, state, country and world for Christ. We make plans in dependence upon the Holy Spirit. “The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps” (Prov. 16:9). “Saying, ‘After I have been there, I must also see Rome.’” -- Paul's long-range goal was to go to Rome, the very center of the Roman Empire and culture. Paul was a pioneer missionary and he wanted to preach the gospel where men had never heard it before. “And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, that I might not build upon another man's foundation” (Rom. 15:20). Paul also had another plan beyond Rome and that was to go to Spain, which was the most westerly outpost of Roman civilization in Europe. “Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain” (Rom. 16:28). Paul was planning three to five years in the future. Now his plan did not all work out like he expected. He got to Rome but he arrived in Roman chains. He may have gone to Spain but we cannot be sure. Paul was a man who knew where he wanted to go and was committed to getting there, for his plans were all geared to glorify God.

Notice Paul said, “I must see Rome.” This is not the “must” of a tourist but the “must” of a missionary. He was compelled to preach the gospel where it had never been preached. The preaching of Christ was a matter of life and death. He was a committed servant who was involved in the purpose of God. “For woe is me if I do not preach the

gospel” (I Cor. 9:16b).  
Preparation (19:22)

“And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.” -- These two men were with Paul in Ephesus, and he sent them ahead to the churches in Macedonia and Achaia to prepare for the collection for the saints in Jerusalem. These two men were ideal choices. Timothy was well-known among these churches and people are not so likely to balk at a collection if they trust a person. It may be that Erastus was the treasurer of Corinth before his conversion to Christ. “Gaius, host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer greets you, and Quartus, the brother” (Rom. 16:23). If so, he too would be a good man to send to prepare people for the taking up of a special offering. Paul undoubtedly tried to choose the right men for the task. Paul stayed behind in Ephesus for a short while in order to pull together the loose ends of the ministry before venturing out for new worlds to conquer for Christ.

#### THE STIR AMONG THE IDOL MAKERS - Acts 19:23-34

Commotion (19:23)

“And about that time there arose no small disturbance concerning the Way.” -- It was Paul's plan to stay in Ephesus and leave just a few weeks before the Day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, but his mind was soon changed. God used a riot in Ephesus to move him out of his security so he could go on to Rome. Who knows, if the riot had never occurred, Paul may have never gotten to Rome. God was just giving Paul a nudge so he would carry out the short-range and long-range goals God had for him.

One of the early names for Christianity was the Way, for Jesus Christ is the only way to God. “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me’” (John 14:6).

Organization (19:24, 25)

“For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen; . . .” -- Apparently, the silversmiths in Ephesus had been organized into a trade union. Perhaps Demetrius was the founder and president of the Ephesian Silversmith's Association. These silversmiths made their living by making little silver shrines or statues of the goddess Artemis or Diana, and they sold them to the people as objects of worship or souvenirs for a large profit. This was their only means of livelihood.

Ephesus was famous for the temple of Artemis which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was 425 feet in length, 220 feet in breadth, and was supported by 127 pillars of Parian marble, each column weighing about 150 tons. It took about 220 years to complete the temple. Artemis was the goddess of earth. She was a many-breasted woman representing Mother Nature, and she was the goddess who

controlled the sexual reproductive powers of men and women. Therefore, the worship of Artemis was very sex oriented. Sacrifices were offered to Artemis, coupled with ceremonial prostitution. The Ephesians considered themselves the temple keepers of the goddess Artemis (cf. 19:35). The legend about Artemis is that she had fallen from the sky near Ephesus. Apparently, what happened is that a meteorite fell from heaven and it looked like a many-breasted woman. These superstitious people made her a goddess. Some have thought that the original statue of Artemis in the temple was carved out of a meteorite.

“These he gathered together with the workmen of similar trades, and said, ‘Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business.’” – Through the preaching of the gospel of Christ, men and women were turning to Christ in great numbers, and these new converts were turning away from every form of idolatry. This, of course, caused the shrine-making business to drop off. The business of making silver idols was falling off, not because of tight money or high interest rates but because Paul and the other Christians were preaching the gospel. These idol makers had been hit where it hurts most -- the pocketbook. They probably would have never shown any concern about Christianity had it not been that they were losing profits.

This is a tremendous testimony to the power of Christ to change lives and destroy idols. Christ does the same thing with modern idols. Whether those idols be material things, drugs, sex, alcohol or whatever these idols will topple when men meet the resurrected Christ. Each time a person comes to Christ for salvation, he affects his culture, and if enough people turn to the Savior, a whole culture can be changed.

#### Opposition (19:26-27)

“And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all.” -- Paul preached Christ and keenly and boldly said that idols are nothing. He declared that there are no gods made with human hands. Surely, Paul pointed out that Artemis and all gods were false gods. Idolatry is the height of stupidity, for men make an object with their own hands and then turn around and pray to the object asking for deliverance.

What kind of God do you serve? Do you serve an idol? Do you serve a god of your own imagination? Or do you serve the one, true and living God as He is revealed in Christ Jesus? Do you bow to the God of Scripture? Does your god exist to do your will or do you exist to do God's will? Is your God the sovereign, holy, just and loving God of the Bible or is he some god you made up?

Was Paul wrong to preach Christ to the Ephesians and mess up their culture? The whole culture of Ephesus centered around the worship of Artemis. Most of the economic structures of that city were somehow connected with the temple of Artemis. Was it right to ruin the economy of Ephesus? The answer is “yes.” Idolatry and all that surrounds idolatry is Satanic, and when idolatry tumbles and Christ is enthroned,

then people get delivered from fears, superstition and darkness, really prospering in life. Let's put it another way. If Christ is preached in a culture where child sacrifice or headhunting is part of the culture, should Christians speak out against these practices? Of course, and so should we show men that all kinds of idolatry, physical and mental, are sin, and only Christ can set a person free. True Christianity will always confront those things which are wrong in any culture head-on.

“And not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless and that she whom all of Asia and the world worship should even be dethroned from her magnificence.” -- Demetrius' second charge was that the reputation of Artemis and the very religion of the city was being threatened. Demetrius implied that Paul was attacking Artemis who was the mother of nature. When they heard that Mother Nature was attacked, this stirred their emotions and hatred for Paul and Christians. These riot engineers were masters at mob psychology and they knew the emotional issues which would stir the people to a frenzy.

Let us not forget that Demetrius' interests in Artemis were garbed in the masquerade of piety. He was motivated by money alone. He had self-interests but gave a religious reason for what he was doing. How many times is religion used to cover up selfish motives! It is an interesting side thought that archeologists have found in the ruins of Ephesus an inscription bearing the name of the man, Demetrius.

#### Emotion (19:28)

“And when they heard this and were filled with rage, they began crying out, saying, ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’” -- The Ephesians, in order to show their dedication to Artemis, began to chant and yell, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” You can see them now waving their placards and crying, “One, two, three, four; we want Artemis and nothing more!” This fanatical crowd had a choice: silver or salvation; gold or God; man's business or God's business; Artemis or Christ. They let their emotions rule their heads and they bowed to a stone idol rather than the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### Confusion (19:29-32)

“And the city was filled with confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's travelling companions from Macedonia.” -- The crowd charged with emotion and hate rushed into the outdoor theater which held about 25,000 people. Apparently, they could not locate Paul so they seized two of Paul's Christian companions, Gaius and Aristarchus. This crowd was like madmen, wild beasts. Perhaps this is what Paul meant in First Corinthians 15:32 when he said, “I fought with the wild beasts in Ephesus.”

“And when Paul wanted to go in to the assembly, the disciples would not let him.” -- Paul wanted to get right into the thick of the battle to defend Christianity and to bail out his friends. While we must respect Paul's bravery at this point, we cannot respect his

wisdom. He, too, was probably pumped up emotionally, and his disciples had to calm him down and show him the folly of exposing himself to that angry crowd.

“And also some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his sent to him and repeatedly urged him not to venture into the theater.” – The Asiarchs were high ranking political and religious leaders. These men were not Christians but they respected the Apostle Paul for his scholarship and commitment to what they considered the cult of Christianity. The Asiarchs who were friends of Paul also urged Paul not to get in front of 25,000 screaming Ephesians who were Christian headhunters.

We should note that Paul made friends with unbelievers even though they never came to Christ. The educated classes highly respected Paul even though they violently disagreed with him.

“So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and the majority did not know for what cause they had come together.” -- Mass confusion reigned in that violent crowd. Notice that Luke makes it clear that the majority of the crowd really did not know why they were there. They were attracted by the excitement of a riot. They received the thrill of mob rule, a semi-legal way to break the law.

#### Devotion (19:33, 34)

“And some of the crowd concluded it was Alexander, since the Jews had put him forward; and having motioned with his hand, Alexander was intending to make a defense to the assembly.” – Apparently, the Jews felt that they would be blamed for the economic slump in Ephesus and the dishonoring of Artemis since the Gentiles recognized Christianity as an offshoot or sect of Judaism. The Jews did not want to be identified with Christians. Therefore, they set forth Alexander as their spokesman. While we cannot be sure, this Alexander may be the same Alexander who Paul mentioned in Second Timothy 4:14, “Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds.” Perhaps Alexander had professed Christ and later turned away, becoming an ardent enemy of the cross. He certainly would have been a good spokesman for the Jews to put up.

“But when they recognized that he was a Jew, a single outcry arose from them all as they shouted for about two hours, ‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!’” -- There was great anti-Semitism among the Gentiles, and just as Alexander was about to speak the crowd began to chant over and over again, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” This slogan aroused their pride, fed their egos, ministered to their emotions and covered up their guilt. They kept this up for two whole hours.

While we must deplore their idolatry, we cannot help but be impressed with their dedication and devotion to Artemis. Their enthusiasm strikes us. Their zeal cannot be denied. While they were motivated by pride, selfishness and hatred, their zeal for a false god was truly amazing. What about our zeal for the true God, Christians? Do we

have as much commitment to the true God as they had to a false god? Of course, we are not asked to meet in mass meetings and shout slogans, but are we willing to move among men and cry out, "Great is Jehovah! Praise to His Son, Jesus Christ!" Are we as committed to Jesus Christ as others are to their false gods?

Men can become very dedicated to false religion because all false religion is motivated by the Devil. Men can have great religious zeal and still be infinitely separated from the true God as He is manifested in Christ.

Recently we have seen the kind of devotion fanatical, cultic worshippers can give one man. Nine hundred persons of the People's Temple in Guyana are dead, half voluntarily committed suicide, in order to be a faithful follower of a demon possessed man, the Rev. Jim Jones. Men can be sincerely devoted to a religious cause and be sincerely wrong.

#### THE SOOTHING BY THE TOWNCLERK - Acts 19:35-41

##### Rationalization (19:35-36)

"And after quieting the multitude the townclerk said, 'Men of Ephesus, what man is there after all who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis, and of the image which fell down from heaven? Since then these are undeniable facts, you ought to keep calm and do nothing rash.'" – The town clerk was the secretary of the city, the executive officer who published the decrees of the civic assembly. He was comparable to our mayor today. The town clerk was a politician and orator who was concerned only for keeping the peace, maintaining the status quo. He was not really concerned about spiritual issues. All he wanted was to make sure that he was elected the next time. The town clerk stood up and gave them reassurance about their idol worship of Artemis guaranteeing that her fall was not in danger. What he said in essence is, "Look at our great temple and our mighty goddess, Artemis. Nothing can happen to them." He was sincere but sincerely wrong. Today Ephesus is in a swamp, the temple is in ruins, and not one person worships Artemis. Christ is known worldwide and Artemis is only a thought in a history book. The town clerk rationalized about Artemis in order to keep the peace.

##### Recognition (19:37)

"For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess." -- Paul and the Christians had not stolen from the temple nor were they sacriligious in any way.

This verse tells us something about apostolic preaching. It was not preaching based on the negative. Paul preached Christ in a positive way and only pointed out the evils of idolatry to make a contrast. Paul opposed idolatry, reasoned against it and endeavored to turn people from it, but his presentation was not harsh, critical or reproachful. Paul did not entitle his first message in Ephesus "Seven Wrong Things About Artemis." No, he preached Christ, "Solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward

God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). He encouraged men to turn first to God and then from idols, “. . . and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God” (I Thess. 1:9). Christians gain nothing by a negative approach with bitter and reviling words. We must preach Christ. When men meet Him, they will turn from idols.

#### Legalization (19:38-41)

“So then, if Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him have a complaint against any man, the courts are in session and proconsuls are available; let them bring charges against one another. But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly.” -- The town clerk was asking the crowd to work within the legal system. They were to use the courts and if they wanted to make new law they were to use their general assembly.

“For indeed we are in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today's affair, since there is no real cause for it; and in this connection we shall be unable to account for this disorderly gathering.” -- The town clerk was concerned that Ephesus might get into trouble with Rome and lose its status as a free city. The Roman government had no time for riots. The Romans put people to death who engaged in riots against the state.

“And after saying this he dismissed the assembly.” -- The town clerk dismissed the assembly but God was behind this move in order to protect Paul and the other Christians in Ephesus. God has His own way of putting down opposition to Christianity.

#### CONCLUSION

Saved. From all of Acts 19, we can see that the Christians in Ephesus were a mighty force for Jesus Christ. They were spiritually alive and making an impact upon their culture for Christ. Paul wrote of them in The Epistle to the Ephesians, “For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you, and your love for all the saints” (Eph. 1:15). Yet, just thirty years later, Christ in The Book of Revelation, says of the Ephesian church, “You have left your first love . . . I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place – unless you repent” (Rev. 2:4, 5). In less than a generation, the church at Ephesus had become cold and indifferent towards Christ. Christian, be on guard about losing your first love for Christ lest you become a target of God's discipline. Are we winning men to Christ? Are we challenging our culture? Are the false gods in Roanoke tumbling as we preach Christ?

Unsaved. For you who are non-Christians, I ask you the question, “Are you following a false god, an idol of your imagination?” You must decide whether you will follow the false gods of our American culture or whether you will follow the Lord Jesus Christ. You cannot follow both. Will you bow to the idols of education, science, materialism, pleasure, sex, drugs, alcohol, or will you bow to the God-Man, Christ? You must make a choice. You cannot follow false gods and Christ at the same time. Jesus said, “No man can serve two masters.” If you choose for false gods, you shall perish for all

eternity like the gods you have decided to follow. If you choose for Christ, you shall live for all eternity, for Christ is the Eternal One, who was resurrected from the dead. Choose this day whom you shall serve!