**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

Four Weeks till the Resurrection - April 4, 2021

 ***To What Church Do You Belong? Acts 19:23-41***

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(Unless otherwise noted, NAS is quoted.)

Regardless of the century that the Good News of God is declared - there will always be opposition. There is opposition from the fallen world’s community structures of religion, politics and economic groups. In the case of Demetrius in Ephesus, all three opposition groups were involved. Paul preaching and teaching that there is only One God, who came to be one of us in the flesh and rose from the grave to pay the price for our sins, was in direct competition to the man-made pagan cult god Artemis of the Ephesians. Like all pagan secular beliefs, The Gospel of God calls for people to turn from pagan gods and beliefs. If God’s Message was received, all three of the fallen world structures at work in Ephesus would be greatly affected; they would be abandoned and left on the trash heap of hell.

These pagan systems are generally rooted in centuries old traditions which are woven into the DNA fabric of a community’s government and economy. We can observe that the Christian Christmas, and what is called Easter, are woven into the religion, economy and politics of Western civilizations. The government supports the holy days, the capitalist must have the sales from those time periods to make profits and the religious groups have increased participation and financial giving. If someone were to come to town with a belief system that would subvert those holy days, it would greatly impact all three groups. There would most likely be severe opposition.

**Demetrius the Silversmith & Artemis of the Ephesians**

 **Acts 19:23** About that time there occurred no small disturbance concerning **the Way. (Points to Jesus as the Way - John 14:6)**

 24 For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen;

 25 these he gathered together with the workmen of similar trades, and said,

"Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business.

 26 "You see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost **all of Asia**, this **Paul** has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people,

**saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all.**

27 "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 will even be dethroned from her magnificence."

**What are the results of unstable people? Rage & Confusion**

 28 When they heard this and were **filled with rage,**

they began crying out, saying, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

 29 The city was **filled with the confusion**, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia.

**Paul, advisedly, does not attend**

 30 And when Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him. 31 Also some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his sent to him and repeatedly urged him not to venture into the theater.

**Pagans confused**

 32 So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly was in confusion and the majority did not know for what reason they had come together.

 33 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.

 34 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!"

**Local government steps-in and speaks-up**

 35 After quieting the crowd, the **town clerk** said,

 "Men of Ephesus, what man is there after all who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of the image which fell down from heaven?

36 "So, since these are undeniable facts, you ought to keep calm and to do nothing rash.

37 "For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess.

38 "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.

39 "But if you want anything beyond this,

it shall be settled in the lawful assembly.

40 "For indeed we are in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today's events, since there is no real cause for it, and in this connection we will be unable to account for this disorderly gathering."

 41 After saying this he dismissed the assembly.

**We can learn many things from this event.**

1. Shrines (building/ structures) dedicated to a religion are temporary.
2. Trinkets made of silver or any substance are temporary.
3. Paul saying that “gods made with hands are no gods at all” accurately identifies pagan secular systems.
4. God is not dependent upon physical structures to be in the presence of people.
5. Fallen secular pagan systems produce people who can easily be enraged. People in these secular systems are tethered to their beliefs through unstable emotion. When their physical structures are threatened or removed, they become very insecure, unstable, confused and enraged.

**Acts 19:28** When they heard this and were filled with rage,

they began crying out, saying, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

29 The city was filled with the confusion.

So, a stranger (Paul) comes to their town and speaks a different message. They are so easily unnerved. A few challenging words, and they become spiritually unhinged. These observations can cause us to examine ourselves.

**Colossians 2:8** See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

**2 Peter 3:17** You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness,

**2 Corinthians 10:5** We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,

What are the Scriptures that biblically teach the correct positioning of God’s presence in our lives? Most Christians will answer these obvious questions correctly.

Do we have great physical structures in which to worship God? Yes.

Does God desire for us to build structures for worship? Yes.

Do we need buildings to be a church? No

God did direct the Jews to build altars in the wilderness and the Temple in Jerusalem. However, it was King Herod, who was not a Believer in God, who expanded the Temple in Jerusalem to be one of the great architectural spectacles of the world. King Herod is the one who ordered babies killed in Bethlehem. The point being that God did not give any direction to expand the Temple; it was fallen man, King Herod, who desired a spectacular complex.

Do we need air-conditioned/heated buildings with all the latest techno lighting/media and sound equipment adapted to playhouse stages to worship God? Yes, I mean No. But few would come?

Where was God before these structures where built? Not in them.

God does not exist in brick & mortar or high-tech media.

All of these are economic profit centers for a lot of people in our community. There is nothing biblically wrong with these profit centers as long as they do not replace or become so important that without them there is a diminishing view of the presence of God in a person’s heart and mind. We live in a time where “bigger is better” fits most people’s definition of success. Obviously, we can see successful ministries in big buildings that minister to thousands of people and proclaim the biblical Gospel of God. At the same time, by the same measure of “bigger is better”, we can see other big buildings and ministries that are in the entertainment and circus business. The difference is in the focus of the ministry. Is the ministry aimed at proclamation, evangelism, assisting people in need and building-up the body of Christ or aimed at building-up the personalities and lifestyle of church leaders? A good example of this can be seen in titles. When we think of sending shoe boxes around the world at Christmas time, what title do we associate with the ministry? “Samaritan’s Purse”. Oh yea, it is run by that guy. . . Franklin Graham. In contrast, some of the world’s largest churches are known only by the name of the senior pastor.

**Focus**

Jesus said to Peter . . . “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”

The message is to keep our eyes on the Lord. This way you will not sink under the waves of the Devil’s entrapments in life or be *tossed about by every doctrine by the trickery of men by craftiness in deceitful scheming;*

*but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,* (Ephesians 4:14-15).

**Matthew 14:24-33**

24 But the boat was already a long distance from the land, battered by the waves; for the wind was contrary.

 25 And in the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea.

 26 When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear.

 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid."

 28 Peter said to Him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

 29 And He said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

 30 But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

 31 Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

 32 When they got into the boat, the wind stopped.

 33 And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, "You are certainly God's Son!"

Take all the structure and high-tech away and **where** is the Church of God and where can the Gospel be **heard**? Constantly being aware that the Church whose head is Jesus Christ is not made with human hands.

**Acts 19:26**

**“saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all.”**

 By Biblical definition, the body of Christ is the Believer’s Church and God as Jesus Christ is the Church’s leader/Pastor. Paul witnesses that Jesus Christ is the head of the Church. *For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body* (Ephesians 5:23). Paul tells the Believers in Rome “*so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another* (Romans 12:5). We also remember that God included all humanity in His offering of general atonement. *The Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel (*Ephesians 3:6).

Paul writes to the Believers in Ephesus encouraging them with the knowledge that God resides in them. This further illustrates where the Church actually resides in this fallen temporal world. With God’s spiritual presence in their inner being, in their hearts through faith, they are grounded in God’s most powerful and authoritative gift – that of love.

This is why we can never be separated from God (Romans 8:35ff). When we witness to others about the Church to which we belong - we can be accurate in sharing that the Church of God, of Jesus Christ, does not have any walls, doors, or pews. We may meet in a building, but our relationships are not contained within brick and mortar. If someone comes to town threatening to tear down a church building or a man-made altar, we are not confused nor go into a state of rage. We possess and take with us the most valuable asset God has given, His love that resides in our hearts. We witness that God’s love transforms and transcends this fallen temporal world to our next life, an eternal life.

A**MEN.**

**Additional Scriptures**

**Ephesians 3:14-19**

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,

15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name,

16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit **in the inner man**

17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts **through faith**; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,

19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

**2 Corinthians 4:6-12**

6 For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone **in our hearts** to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

 7 **But we have this treasure in earthen vessels,**

so that the surpassing greatness of the power

will be of God and not from ourselves;

 8 we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed;

perplexed, but not despairing;

9 persecuted, but not forsaken;

struck down, but not destroyed;

10 always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus,

so that the **life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.**

 11 For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

 12 So death works in us, but life in you.

**2 Corinthians 13:5** Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you-- unless indeed you fail the

test?

**Philippians 1:6** For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.