

'HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH...'

SERIES: PAUL, AN INSTRUMENT OF THE RISEN CHRIST

by Ron Ritchie

For several years Ray C. Stedman has been burdened by the Lord to find a way to strengthen preachers and teachers in Biblical exposition. He and many other godly men around the country feel that our culture is like a rudderless ship on the sea in a storm. Modern life multiplies stresses and confuses our sense of direction. The great need within the Body of Christ is to hear and respond to the Lord, for God speaks truth through his Word and corrects our course.

In 1982, the *Committee On Biblical Exposition* (COBE) was formed for the purposes of strengthening Bible exposition, revival in the church, and effective evangelism in local communities and throughout the world. Following a series of regional conferences, the COBE board decided to hold a National Convention in Anaheim, California, in March, 1986. For four days more than 3,000 people, including most of our pastors here at Peninsula Bible Church, attended for Bible instruction and encouragement. The Lord then led the board of COBE to hold a second conference in Houston, Texas. Last week, I had the privilege to be part of the team of preachers and teachers who were asked by COBE to encourage and instruct fellow preachers and teachers in the joy of making the truth of the Word of God come alive. I was encouraged by the number who were open to incorporating the gospel of Jesus Christ in their own lives and were willing to pass that truth in their churches and neighborhoods.

The world needs the gospel! John said, "...grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17) In Christ resides all the truth we need to face life, for Christ who is the truth holds the secrets of the universe and the nations, as he holds the truth in our own lives and hearts. Jesus is the key to life. He is the true revelation of things as they really are. This was demonstrated by his birth, his life, his miracles, his death and resurrection. And his work continues to be demonstrated by his invisible but real presence in the hearts of Christians throughout the world even at this moment.

Jesus said to the Jews, "If you abide in my word, then you are truly disciples of mine; and you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:32). What did he mean, "the truth shall set you free"? Truth is God's special revelation which has its heart and center in the work of Christ. Such knowledge, born of revelation and experience, sets one free. One is free when sin no longer rules over him and when the Word of God dominates his heart and life. One is free, therefore, not when he can do what he wants to do but when he agrees to do what God wants him to do by the power of the risen Lord.

This is the same truth that Paul and his disciples taught in the city of Ephesus during the years 54 through 57 A.D. We have already learned that Ephesus was a fortress of Satan; its inhabitants were held in the bondage that led to death. Lacking the truth of God, the people were hostage to idolatry. Their sources of spiritual truth were witches and warlocks, magicians and idolators. They were held captive by the chains of greed, superstition, immorality, fear, guilt and emptiness. Ephesus was a city of wasted lives, lives which were ruled by Satan and his demons. This then was the arena into which Paul brought the gospel of Jesus Christ. He first shared it in the synagogue, and when his teaching was rejected he rented the school of Tyrannus which became the center of his teaching for the next two years. The truth of God's word began to tear down the strongholds of Satan, delivering a group of people out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. Demons were on the run; magic books were being burned; the Word of God was prevailing

But Paul was not free from spiritual warfare during this time of ministry. He faced what he would later describe as a "day of many adversaries," first in Ephesus, then in Jerusalem, and finally in Rome. In his letter to the Ephesians, written from Rome, he would later say, "stand firm, therefore, having girded your loins with truth." When he wrote this, Paul was thinking of a Roman soldier going into battle. The soldier would first

tuck his tunic under his girdle so as to leave his legs free and unimpeded for the battle. "Girding the loins" then was one of the first things a soldier did in readiness for battle. The apostle was illustrating the point that as the Christian battles in the conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil, he girds up his loins by means of the truth of God.

In our study in Acts 19 today we will see the power of the truth of God on the hellish city of Ephesus, on the murderous men of Corinth, and in the death of a Christian in Troas.

I. Truth resists idolatry, 9: 21-41

Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

Here in these opening verses we find that the apostle wants to go up to Jerusalem again but this time with the collection for the Jewish famine relief fund which he would gather in a few months from the saints in Greece. He would go to freely to Jerusalem, but then he would be arrested and taken in chains to Rome. Thus, Paul remains on in Ephesus for a time.

While he is there, the enemy confronts him, wearing a new disguise, as we will see in verses 23-27.

And about that time there arose no small disturbance concerning the Way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, was bringing no little business to the craftsmen; these he gathered together with the workmen of similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that our prosperity depends upon this business. And 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. 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."

As we have pointed out, the truth of the word of God was challenging the strongholds of Satan on all fronts in the city of Ephesus. But Satan was now going to strike back because the religious business at the temple of Artemis was having a Black Monday! Within the city stood the Temple of Artemis, the mother of gods and men in Asia Minor. The temple was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The image of Artemis was not beautiful, for this many-breasted woman who symbolized fertility was carved out a black meteorite which the priests said had fallen from heaven. A prosperous business had sprung up around this temple to serve the residents as well as the religious tourists.

Demetrius, a local silversmith, made silver shrines of Artemis. At end of Paul's teaching ministry in Ephesus, this man noticed a considerable decrease in business. He gathered the local trade union members, as it were, and defined the problem. In the past, they had a very good business in silver souvenirs. Their prosperity depended on this religious business, but it had been falling off in recent months. The fly in the ointment, this man reasoned, was the apostle Paul who had taught that "gods made with hands are no gods at all," thereby turning away many potential customers. The two immediate results of this were that trade had fallen off, and there was a danger that the temple of Artemis, whom all Asia and the world worshiped, might be regarded as worthless.

We discover the enemy's tactics in verses 28-34.

And when they heard this and were filled with rage, they began crying out, saying, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" And 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. And when Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples

would not let him. And also some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his sent to him and repeatedly urged him not to venture into the theater. 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. 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. 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!"

By now Demetrius had gotten through to the union that both their religion and their business were being devastated by Paul and his teaching. Enraged by this, they came up with the tactic of getting the crowd to rally around the cry, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" The mob then set out to find Paul and his disciples. Failing to find the apostle, they settled instead for Gaius and Aristarchus whom they dragged to the local theater. When Paul became aware of this he wanted to go and address them but his friends urged him not.

By now the mob was so confused the majority of them did not know why they had come together in the first place. Some concluded it was Alexander's fault, and as he was about to make a defense, recognizing that he was a Jew, the mob again began to cry, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" I am reminded of James 3:14-15: "If you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heartthis wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic, for where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing."

In verses 35 through 41 we learn of the enemy's defeat.

And after quieting the multitude, 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? Since then these are undeniable facts, you ought to keep calm and to do nothing rash. For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers nor blasphemers of our goddess. 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. 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." And after saying this he dismissed the assembly.

Having been held captive by Satan and demonic worship, greed and fear, the Ephesians were now being carried away by a senseless mob who were drowning in confusion, hatred, rage and murderous intent. They were inflamed after two hours of screaming and shouting "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians," as though that would bring back the lost trade for the silversmiths. But Satan had overstepped his boundaries. A town clerk who reasoned with them and appealed to political reality was able to send the mob home. "We are the guardians of the great temple of Artemis," he reasoned, "so let's keep calm. Gaius and Aristarchus are not robbers of temples, nor blasphemers of our goddess. Demetrius and the trade unionists are free to appeal to the courts to redress their problem. Our immediate problem now is that we are in danger of being accused of starting a riot. This case is dismissed! If we don't calm down, Rome will step in and then all hell will break loose!"

Let us examine the spiritual principles that are found here. As Christians, we are in a spiritual battle in which we face many adversaries. But as Christians we know that we must look at all of life on two levels, the physical and the spiritual. Christians are to not fight the physical battles on a physical level like the world does, but rather on a spiritual level and with spiritual weapons. "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses," says the apostle (1 Cor.10:4). In the immediate context of Ephesus, Satan's strongholds were: the proud, hard hearts of the Jewish leaders, the occult, black arts and idolatry. And yet the risen Lord, through the love of the apostle for the Lord, and the word of truth over a period of three years, penetrated the very kingdom of Satan and delivered many captives over to the Kingdom

of God.

As Christians, we need to heed the Lord in this day, for if we would by faith "gird our loins with truth," we could in time see the defeat of the lies of Satan in the strongholds of drugs, sexual confusion, immorality, and the abortion and pornography industries. Behind all these social problems are real people who are victims of the evil one, just like you and I once were his victims. By being available to our Lord, and by faith being willing to teach the truth of God about all of life, many of Satan's victims can be delivered from his deadly kingdom.

Recent articles in the weekly news magazines declare that America is losing the war on drug trafficking. Here is another stronghold of Satan. A special narcotics prosecutor in New York said last week, "If we are winning the war on drugs, every American better just pray each night that we don't lose." The reason we and the Western nations are losing this war on drugs is that we are using human weapons to combat it. This New York prosecutor, perhaps even unknowingly, has identified the weapon which we must use if this war is to be won. Prayer is the only weapon which is able to defeat this stronghold of Satan.

I saw a political cartoon the other day showing the Grim Reaper depicted as drugs, gathering up thousands of people who are addicted to this scourge. In the corner, President Reagan is wearing a button on his lapel that says, "Just Say No!", while he himself is saying, "Well...we're doing the best we can." But just saying 'no' is powerless in the face of the drug trade. There is no power in saying that any more than there is power in a red traffic light at 3 a.m. to make you stop and obey the law. You must still choose to obey that sign. According to the word of God, prayer is the most effective way to challenge and defeat the stronghold of Satan which is manifested in the drug trade.

On the weekend as I flew back from Dallas I sat next to a young man who told me he was a pipe fitter for a company that built nuclear power plants. I told him I was a pastor and that led him off on a series of questions about TV evangelists. When we finally put that one to rest he told me of his own struggles with drugs and an immoral relationship. He had been a churchgoer once, he said, but he had never been taught anything. Sitting next to us was a woman reading the Bible in the edition called "The Book." By the time the flight ended I had gained his confidence enough so that he asked me to mail him a copy of "The Book," and also to try and find him a church he could attend in his home town. This is the power of the truth of God at work.

So, having seen how this truth resisted the challenge of idolatry in Ephesus, let us now look at how the truth of God continued to challenge the Jews in Corinth.

II. Truth resists the Jewish plot 20:1-6

And after the uproar had ceased, Paul sent for the disciples and when he had exhorted them and taken his leave of them, he departed to go to Macedonia. And when he had gone through those districts and had given them much exhortation, he came to Greece. And there he spent three months, and when a plot was formed against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he determined to return through Macedonia. And he was accompanied by Sopater of Berea, the son of Pyrrhus; and by Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. But these had gone on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas. And we sailed from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and came to them at Troas within five days; and there we stayed seven days.

Paul left Ephesus and traveled to northern Greece to pick up the monies which had been collected for famine relief in Jerusalem. He then returned to Corinth, where he ministered for three months, but not without spiritual conflict (Rom.15). The Jews who had tried to get rid of him earlier again began to harass him. Despite this warfare, however, the apostle was able to write his majestic letter to the Romans in which he was to say, "...who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written: " For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long. We

were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us" (Rom.8:35-39). Paul was forced to leave Corinth. He departed by sea to Syria, but the Jews again intervened and he had to walk all the way to Philippi. He spent Easter there, together with Luke, while seven other disciples went ahead to Troas where they planned to meet Paul later. The apostle had "girded his loins" with the truth of God and thus he was able to face the spiritual battle once more in Corinth. As he said in Romans 8, "...I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom.8:18).

At the COBE conference, many of the speakers seemed to be under spiritual attack. The host pastor had to enter the hospital with a heart condition. Another pastor was grieving over the death of his brother and found it difficult to preach. Yet another pastor received a phone call about his son who suffers from a rare disease that sends him into uncontrollable fits. But in the midst of these trials each one was trusting in the truth of the word of God that God was in control and that everything was on schedule.

We have seen that the truth of the gospel was able to resist the idolatry of Ephesus and the Jewish plot in Corinth. In the next section we will see that this truth is going to resist the last enemy which Satan throws at us, death itself.

III. Truth resists death 20:7-16

And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight. And there were many lamps in the upper room where we were gathered together. And there was a certain young man named Eutychus sitting on the window sill, sinking into a deep sleep; and as Paul kept on talking, he was overcome by sleep and fell down from the third floor, and was picked up dead. But Paul went down and fell upon him and after embracing him, he said, "Do not be troubled, for his life is in him." And when he had gone back up, and had broken the bread and eaten, he talked with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. And they took away the boy alive, and were greatly comforted. But we, going ahead to the ship, set sail for Assos, intending from there to take Paul on board; for thus he had arranged it, intending himself to go by land. And when he met us at Assos, we took him on board and came to Mitylene. And sailing from there, we arrived the following day opposite Chios; and the next day we crossed over to Samos; and the day following we came to Miletus. For Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus in order that he might not have to spend time in Asia; for he was hurrying to be in Jerusalem, if possible, on the day of Pentecost.

This is Paul's third visit to the port city of Troas where a church had already been established. As he and his disciples were gathered on Sunday evening for communion, the remembrance of the Lord's death, burial and resurrection, right in the middle of this memorial service death makes an unannounced entrance. Luke, the doctor who wrote this book of Acts, makes reference to the fact that there were "many lamps" in the room where they were meeting, thus it is safe to assume that the oxygen supply in the room was lacking. A young man named Eutychus who was sitting in an upstairs window listening to Paul fell asleep and then tumbled from the window down to the courtyard below. When his friends got to him they found he was dead. But Paul said, "Do not be troubled, for life is in him."

Here we find that the spiritual principle is that although Satan thinks that death is his victory over humanity, such is not the case. Jesus said to Mary and Martha following the death of their brother Lazarus, "I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me shall live even if he dies." Then Jesus prayed to his Father to raise Lazarus from the dead so that through him his Father might be glorified. Later, Jesus would tell his disciples that they would be given power to rise the dead (Matt:10:8). So Paul, by the power of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, was able to rise the dead and defeat Satan, as well as confirm the truth of the gospel. The same God who raised Jesus from the dead is our heavenly Father. We can now say by faith with the prophet Hosea, "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" Peter wrote, "For we were born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

What a witness to the truth that Jesus is our risen and present Lord and Savior! He and he alone is the ruler over death. We are followers of the God who can raise the dead. Someone has said, "Hope is hearing the

music of the future. Faith is to dance to it now. So let's dance!"

At daybreak on Monday, Paul and his disciples made their plans to go to Jerusalem. You can be sure that every time the disciples in Troas were tempted to doubt the truth of our Lord concerning life or death, they had only to look at Eutychus walking among them. That would put their hearts to rest.

Paul Gann, the tax crusader, contracted AIDS through a contaminated blood transfusion a couple of years ago. On Friday evening last, during a Billy Graham Crusades telecast, he told the TV audience that the key to life was to place one's life into the life of Christ, to trust him for life now and life in eternity. What a testimony this man has! Jesus said there was life after death and this man had placed his faith in that statement. He believed in the truth of the word of God.

This too was what Paul and the other apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ believed. Thus was death, Satan's last trump card, defeated by the power of our Lord.

"Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might," says Paul, "and put on the full armor of God that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil." This is what we as Christians must do. We must put on the full armor of God, and part of that armor is the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Then, having girded our loins with truth, our Lord will enable us to set men and women free from the worship of demons, greed, self-interest, religion, superstition, fear, guilt and shame. He will enable us to set men and women free from pride, self-righteousness, and the blindness that shuts out the light that would enable them to see that he is the Son of the Living God. And he will set them free from the fear and the power of death. Only Jesus Christ can raise men from the dead. He is our only hope now and in the future because of His own resurrection from the dead, for in Jesus Christ alone is the way, the truth and the life.

Catalog No. 4102
Acts 19:21-20:16
Seventeenth Message
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March 13, 1988

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