

Motives  
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Acts 19:11-20

Opening: Demonic activity and spiritual warfare are real. I dare say every sincere follower of Christ and student of God's word believes that. If I took a poll, I might ask two questions: 1) How many think about that often? 2) How many would rather not think about it? Where is the balance in how Christ followers should think about that subject?

The light of Christ is needed everywhere but especially in the darkest places. In the city of Ephesus, demonic darkness was rampant. That's why it was such an important mission field for the Apostle Paul. In this text we see though demonic darkness in Ephesus was real, the power of Jesus broke through that darkness in a dramatic way.

What is the point of this text? There are several realities we will see:

- **God's miraculous power is real.** He has chosen to show it differently today.
- **Spiritual warfare is real.** When Jesus is blessing, Satan is working overtime. Followers of Christ should fear God but beware of (and resist) Satan.
- **The occult is real and nothing to be toyed with.** Jesus can deliver people from the grip of the occult if they will acknowledge Him as the source of all power.
- **False teachers are real.** Motives matter in ministry and those who pretend to represent Christ for their own selfish gain will be dealt with by God, if not in this life, then in the next.
- **Motives really matter for followers of Christ.** We'll discuss why that is.

**Acts 19:11–20 (NLT)** — 11 God gave Paul the power to perform unusual miracles. 12 When handkerchiefs or aprons that had merely touched his skin were placed on sick people, they were healed of their diseases, and evil spirits were expelled.

- One commentator concisely summarized this passage: *In a city where Satan had gained a foothold and the supernatural was a dominating theme, God's Spirit performed miracles that demonstrated Jesus' power over supernatural powers!*<sup>i</sup>
- Verse 11: *"God GAVE Paul the power to perform unusual miracles."*
- Luke was clear that God is the source of miraculous activity.
- We wonder why God gave Paul this power? Wiersbe: *"God enabled Paul to perform "special miracles" because Ephesus was a center for the occult (Acts 19:18–19), and Paul was demonstrating God's power right in Satan's territory."*<sup>ii</sup>
- Why did Jesus perform public miracles and enable the Apostles to do that?
- Wiersbe again: *"...(1) to show His compassion and meet human needs; (2) to teach spiritual truths; and (3) to present His credentials as the Messiah. The Apostles followed this same pattern in their miracles."*<sup>iii</sup>
- We know God is doing miracles today but why don't we see them like this?
- It's a great theological debate beyond the scope of this study. The "Cliff's Notes":

- “Cessationists” believe that the miraculous gifts were primarily for the establishment of the early church and ceased after the apostolic era.
- “Continuationists” maintain that God still performs miracles today, though perhaps not as frequently or dramatically.
- I like what John Piper said, “...[T]here were fewer miracles in the Bible than you probably think, and there are more miracles today than you probably know.”<sup>iv</sup>
- What do we need to know? God still performs miracles – full stop.
- That was just verse 11! Let’s quickly look at the “Seven Sons of Sceva” in 13-16.

**13** A group of Jews was traveling from town to town casting out evil spirits. They tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus in their incantation, saying, “I command you in the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, to come out!” **14** Seven sons of Sceva, a leading priest, were doing this. **15** But one time when they tried it, the evil spirit replied, “I know Jesus, and I know Paul, but who are you?” **16** Then the man with the evil spirit leaped on them, overpowered them, and attacked them with such violence that they fled from the house, naked and battered.

- The Sons of Sceva were Jewish exorcists who saw Jesus’ name as just another magical incantation. They were “hucksters” exploiting religion for money.
- Paul wrote to the church at Corinth about false teachers like these in **2 Corinthians 11:13–15 (NLT)** — **13** *These people are false apostles. They are deceitful workers who disguise themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 But I am not surprised! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 So it is no wonder that his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. In the end they will get the punishment their wicked deeds deserve.*
- Jesus said in **Matthew 7:22–23 (NLT)** — **22** *On judgment day many will say to me, ‘Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.’ 23 But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God’s laws.’*
- Motives matter in ministry and those who pretend to represent Christ for their own selfish gain will be dealt with by God, if not in this life, then in the next.
- **1 John 4:1-3** tells us how to “test those who claim to speak by the Spirit.”
- A true prophet of God acknowledges that Jesus Christ (God’s Son) “came in a real body” (lived, died for our sins, and rose again.) “Those who don’t accept this truth about Jesus are not from God and have the spirit of the Antichrist.”

**17** The story of what happened spread quickly all through Ephesus, to Jews and Greeks alike. A solemn fear descended on the city, and the name of the Lord Jesus was greatly honored. **18** Many who became believers confessed their sinful practices. **19** A number of them who had been practicing sorcery brought their incantation books and burned them at a public bonfire. The value of the books was several million dollars.

- The occult, witchcraft, sorcery, black magic, and satanic rituals were prevalent in Ephesus. That made it an important place for Paul to share the light of Christ.
- Look at the key phrases in those verses: “...*the name of the Lord Jesus was greatly honored*”...“*many...became believers [confessing] their sinful*

*practices*”...they were so changed that they burned their occult books; books on which they had wasted millions (in today’s dollars). Verse twenty says:

**20** So the message about the Lord spread widely and had a powerful effect.

- God used unusual miracles, false teachers, and occult practices to set the stage in Ephesus for a display for all to see of how the power of Jesus changes lives.
- We fret about how dark the world has become. It’s always been dark. God’s most dramatic work happens when He brings the light of Christ to the darkest places!
- Let’s circle back to two questions that apply to our lives today.
- Demonic activity and spiritual warfare are real. Satan and his demons are active and dangerous. How should Christ-followers think about that with balance?
- Scripture commands us to only fear God, so we should not fear Satan. However, we should also not minimize Satan and his schemes.
- **1 Peter 5:8–9 (NLT)** — **8** Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. **9** Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your family of believers all over the world is going through the same kind of suffering you are.
- **Romans 8:31 (NLT)** — **31** ...If God is for us, who can ever be against us?
- **1 John 4:4 (NLT)** — **4** ...the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world.
- **James 4:7–8 (NLT)** — **7** ...Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. **8** Come close to God, and God will come close to you...
- Pastor Jeremy used a great illustration from his boyhood: *“Son, that snake is dead but it can still hurt you!”* We should think of Satan as a defeated foe who still poses a threat. We must be vigilant and resistant, but not fearful, because *“the one who is in [us] is greater than the one who is in the world”* (1 John 4:4).
- A final question we didn’t answer. We saw why motives matter in ministry. Let’s deal with this important question for all followers of Christ: If good comes from what we do, why do our motives matter? Any thoughts? Here are my thoughts:
- **1 Corinthians 10:31 (NLT)** “...whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”
- Jesus said in **Matthew 5:16 (NLT)** — **16** In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.
- If my motives are selfish who is getting the glory?
- **Isaiah 42:8 (NLT)** — **8** “I am the Lord...I will not give my glory to anyone else...”
- When I’m getting the glory instead of God what happens to my heart and mind?
- **Proverbs 16:18 (NLT)** — **18** Pride goes before destruction, and haughtiness before a fall.
- The most important reason to have right motives is that God knows our hearts.
- **Proverbs 16:2 (NLT)** — **2** People may be pure in their own eyes, but the Lord examines their motives.
- **Matthew 6:1 (NLT)** — **1** “Watch out! Don’t do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven.
- **James 4:3 (NLT)** — **3** And even when you ask, you don’t get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.

- What is the RIGHT motivation for doing good works? *“Our purpose is to please God, not people. He alone examines the motives of our hearts”* (1 Thess.2:4)<sup>v</sup>
- It has been said, *“You can fool all the people some of the time and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time.”*<sup>vi</sup> I would add, we might fool people about our motives, but we NEVER fool God!

So, What are the Takeaways?

- **God’s miraculous power is real.** He has chosen to show it differently today.
- **Spiritual warfare is real.** We should fear God but beware of (and resist) Satan.
- **The occult is real and nothing to be toyed with.** Jesus can deliver people from the grip of the occult if they will acknowledge Him as the source of all power.
- **False teachers are real.** Those who pretend to represent Christ for their own selfish gain will be dealt with by God, if not in this life, then in the next. We need to “test” any teacher or preacher based on their view of Christ and scripture.
- **Motives really matter for followers of Christ.** Paul wrote, *“So whether we are here in this body or away from this body, our goal is to please him. For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body.”* (2 Cor. 5:9–10) (NLT)
- Our motives matter because God cannot be fooled and He knows when they are not pure and will one day hold us accountable for those motives.

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<sup>i</sup> Richards, L. O. (1987). [The teacher’s commentary](#) (p. 794). Victor Books.

<sup>ii</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 1, p. 481). Victor Books.

<sup>iii</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 1, p. 481). Victor Books.

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/why-do-we-see-so-few-miracles-today>

<sup>v</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (1 Th 2:4). Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/275126-you-can-fool-some-of-the-people-all-of-the>