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# EPHESUS

## And Why Paul Never Protested

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### INTRODUCTION

It seems like 21st Century Christian leaders have become experts about how wicked and how unresponsive to the Gospel their cities are; and, they feel as though they have accomplished something by merely condemning sinful practices in their culture/city. Paul spent little time condemning people because he was so busy talking about the great grace of God, and how much He has done for us.

While in Turkey, we went to Ephesus to view the ruins, and I was profoundly impressed by a few details regarding the city—it gave me a new appreciation while reading the Books of Acts and Ephesians:

Ephesus was the second largest city in the Empire in the time of Paul (approx. 200,000). It was a center of commerce and trade that influenced all of Asia (Turkey); its theater could seat 24,000 people. Though the Early Church had only 12 members, it grew to impact the whole city.

As the birthplace of, and site of the primary temple, dedicated to the goddess Artemis (Dianna), Ephesus was one of the most pagan and hedonistic cities in the empire. It boasted least 15 different temples to gods and goddesses, and sported gross sexuality (including wide-spread homosexuality—especially lesbian activity) as matter-of-fact behavior, among almost the whole population. At the heart of the city, two main avenues intersected and a huge brothel stood there—advertising in stone on the avenues to accommodate every sexual desire for men or women.

### PAUL'S APPROACH MAKES A DIFFERENCE

I was struck by the fact that in Paul's letter to the believers in Ephesus, he did not rail against the city or its practices; he simply talked about how, having been dead in our sins, we are being saved by grace. Paul kept teaching Kingdom stuff in Tyrannus' school for two years.

Ephesus was more “post-Christian,” “pagan” and immoral than any city in our world today, so I felt a renewed vigor to tirelessly present the Gospel to our society RATHER THAN to give myself excuses about the ungodly and “hard” culture in which I minister.

Ephesus was the scene where two of Paul’s friends were dragged by a mob to the local amphitheater because the message of Jesus was ruining the idol business of many merchants. Paul’s teachings had so impacted the city—without needing to condemn *other religions and belief systems*—that those systems attacked Christians. Is that, perhaps, a clue to us in the 21st Century? Is the Church already admitting defeat when it feels the need go on the offensive by attacking belief systems in its setting, rather than so transforming individual people with the Gospel that the Church becomes the target of attack?

Realizing that Ephesus was far more alien and hostile to the way of the Lord than any city or culture of today, also gave my heart caution against a mentality that is currently becoming vogue among some Christian leaders who feel that the Bible isn’t quite meaningful enough for the “post-modern” mindset—and that the message has to be radically reconfigured (not just translated into today’s language) to make it less straightforward.

Whereas Paul spent his “two years” in Ephesus speaking out boldly...reasoning and persuading about the kingdom of God, and daily teaching his disciples and anyone else who would listen (Acts 19:8-10), some “post-modern” thinkers urge us to spend the initial two years in our cities being careful not to speak too much about the Kingdom, but to (instead) build relationships and couch our evangelism (declaration of good news) in a less-offensive, friendlier package. I’m not suggesting that we blast people, but can’t we find an alternative to 1) blasting people with incomprehensible, condemning religious language, and/or 2) virtually avoiding any subjects of spiritual truth that challenge how people already live and think?

Are we missing something of Paul’s approach? He wasted no time condemning “dead” people for doing what spiritually “dead” people naturally do—and if there weren’t a hell or God, wouldn’t I do what they’re doing? Paul did not see his job as preaching against sin and sinners. He had no calling to tell people how bad they were; instead, he told everyone about the mysteries of the Kingdom and about the great love God has lavished upon us.

But neither did Paul remain quiet about the Lord, only responding to people’s questions. He was proactive, teaching openly and boldly in the midst of a culture that would make the most ardent post-modernist blanche.

There is, as well, a tendency among some pastors to downplay the observable ministry of the Holy Spirit. Not so with Paul.