

The Great Stories of the Early Church
71-Paul at Ephesus 06
The Powerful Work of the Holy Spirit at Ephesus
Acts 19:21-41

- 21 After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.
- 22 So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season.
- 23 And the same time there arose no small stir about that way.
- 24 For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen;
- 25 Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.
- 26 Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands:
- 27 So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.
- 28 And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.
- 29 And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.
- 30 And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not.
- 31 And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre.
- 32 Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.
- 33 And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people.
- 34 But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.
- 35 And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?
- 36 Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly.
- 37 For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.
- 38 Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another.

- 39 But if ye inquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly.
- 40 For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse.
- 41 And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly. KJV

Introduction:

To set the timing of our message, we are in the Third Missionary Journey of the apostle Paul and he has come to the area of modern Turkey that he had originally been forbidden to enter by the Holy Spirit. After an introduction of the gospel had been made to the Jews who partially received it but mostly rejected it, Paul had turned his attention to the Gentiles and had been given a marvelous ministry to them which Luke summarized in v.10.

Acts 19:10

- 10 And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. KJV

God gave special power for incredible miracles to be performed and the impact of it all was that which prompted the text we have before. The spread of the gospel and the great number of converts began to have a profound effect upon the culture and even upon the businesses of the area.

Paul determined to pass back through Macedonia and Greece and then to return to Jerusalem. He sent ahead of him into the areas before him Timothy and Erastus while he remained behind, apparently for about six months. The events of our story today occurred during that time. Luke leads us to believe that the Awakening had ebbed somewhat but that the effects still remained.

Acts 19:21

- 21 After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. KJV

In this text we see a sad but almost universal reality that practically every person who has ever been exposed to religion of any kind or persuasion has seen, the impact of money on what is supposed to be the sincere worship of God.

We see it put forward in a very straightforward way by Demetrius the silversmith.

- 24 For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen;
- 25 Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.

Acts 19:23-26

- 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. NASU

There was an entire association of trade guilds that had grown up around the temple of Diana, also called Artemis, not only in Ephesus but in the whole region of Asia. These men had apparently become wealthy through making and selling images of Diana to those who worshiped at the temples there.

Their controversy with Paul was not theological though they tried to make it so. Their problem was that he was costing them money and they were determined to lose nothing more to him and his preaching.

Their method of opposing him was to stir up the religious fervor of the people by claiming that the reputation of Diana was being threatened and that her honor was being defamed.

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- 27 So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.
- 28 And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

One need only ask the question to realize the proper answer. If Paul's preaching was turning multitudes away from the temple but they were continuing to buy the images, would there have been an uproar? You know that there would not. The issue was not the "magnificence" of Diana but the money they were losing. Had Paul not cost them money there would have been scarce a peep out of them.

Somewhere in the depths of all of us there is the idea that religion is to be about truth, truth about God and what it is that we are to do to be in His good graces or at least to avoid His wrath. Every form of worship that exists is some configuration of those ideas.

In that same deep recess of the soul every one of us scoffs at the idea of worshiping as Deity that which is only a figment of the imagination. We ridicule the idea of treating as real that which only fantasy and the invention of elaborate dreamscape of someone's mind. None of us would ever want to be found considering as Deity that which did not exist and had never existed. We are convinced that in order to be trusted as real a thing or a person or an entity must indeed **BE** real.

This is the problem of the presence of a spirit of greed in any religious movement or organization.

Why is this a problem? Because Truth cares nothing for profit. Truth is a bulldozer. It cares nothing for feelings, nothing for opinions, nothing for anyone's welfare at all. It does not care what the beliefs of the majority or the minority are, in fact, it cares nothing for the beliefs of

creatures at all.

Physics has discovered a set of principles, truth if you will. If radioactive materials are handled in certain ways explosions of the most incredible kinds are created. There are governments around the world which have mastered the process and have built devices which can produce these kinds of explosions. If one of them were to be launched on a rocket over the United States and find its way to the Memphis area, would those principles of physics care what happens to you and me, or our families? We know they would not, which is the reason we are concerned about North Korea having such devices.

This is what I mean by saying that truth is a bulldozer. Spiritual truth is the same. God has revealed a truth in His Word, "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." Did He consult you before publishing that reality? Does He care what your opinion about that is? Truth is merciless in that way. It tramples down and destroys without care everything that is contrary to it.

Truth must be handled in a very specific way in order to be useful and helpful. It does no good, for example, for truth to be kept secret by an elite few and the majority of humanity to be deprived of it. And it does no good for truth to be handled unjustly and without integrity. It becomes a weapon of destruction and not an instrument of good.

Let us consider a close corollary of truth, Justice.

Justice is Truth as it pertains to Law and the world is well familiar with what happens when Justice is perverted.

One of the famous images of Justice is a woman blindfolded and holding a balance. The idea is that reality is weighed in the balances and either found legal or illegal and the woman cares nothing for the personalities being weighed. Justice thus envisioned does not care if the person whose deeds are being examined is wealthy or poor, powerful or insignificant, man or woman, black, brown or white. Justice is what it is and the sentence is meted out accordingly.

This was the vision of those who assembled the ideas and principles that would form this country and for many of our judges it has been the goal and target of their labors. But we all know what has happened. The longer our country has been in existence, the further we have drifted from those principles and the less blind Justice has become. The scales have also become tilted so that the wealthy often get away with behaviors that the poor are imprisoned for. And, Why? Because of the growing influence of money in our political system.

The introduction of greed and money into our political/legal system has perverted it until today it is in many ways laughable. And, indeed, it would be funny if it did not wield so much power.

But you see the issue, I hope. Justice, in its pure form, Truth as it applies to Law, cares nothing for the identity of the one accused nor of the accuser. It is only interested in which is absolutely correct, proper, and legal. It is both the Mighty Defender of the innocent and an Engine of Destruction for the guilty.

This is what we hope for if we are innocent - a system that cares nothing about the person, privilege or power of our accuser - a system that would close the door hard on any and every false accusation against us. It would also be a system greatly feared by the guilty.

But as important as Justice is (*and it is vitally important*) Truth concerning Religion is Infinitely more important.

Truth concerning Religion tells us Who God Is as well as What It Takes to be right with Him, to escape His Judgment, to know His Blessing.

The consequences of human Justice reach only as far as physical life reaches and Jesus compared it to Spiritual Truth in this statement.

Matt 10:28

28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. KJV

The reach of human justice ends at the grave but the implications of Spiritual Truth extend into, and last just as long as, Eternity itself.

The first recorded instance we have of the mingling of money with religion is found in the story of Balaam. We are sure this is not the first time it occurred but it is the first discussion of it in scripture.

As Israel journeyed from Egypt to Canaan they encountered a kindred people, the descendants of Moab, one of the sons of Lot by his daughters. The Moabites were totally and completely heathen and were afraid of Israel because they, like the rest of the tribes of the area, had heard what God had done to Pharaoh and Egypt because of them. The king of Moab, Balak, had what he thought was a good idea, he would hire a prophet to pronounce a curse upon Israel to destroy them and would escape any damage from conflict with them.

So, he hired the corrupt prophet Balaam to work his magic upon Israel. But, God would not allow it but forced him to bless Israel rather than curse them. In spite of the unmistakable moving of God upon him, Balaam ultimately came up with a plan to cause the Lord to move in judgment upon Israel. He absolutely knew what the will of God was but he used the truth he knew to get gain for himself and to cause trouble for the people of God. He misused the truth he knew for the sake of money.

Throughout their history in the land Israel was plagued with prophets and priests who failed to uphold the truth because they were bribed to say things the people wanted to hear rather than what God had said.

Jer 5:31

31 The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof? KJV

Jer 5:30-31

30 "A horrible thing has happened in this land- 31 the priests are ruled by false prophets, and my people like it so! But your doom is certain. TLB

Rather than listen to the true prophets of God the people often chose to listen to those who told them that God need not be served so severely as He demanded, that it would be fine to offer the lame and sick animals to Him rather than the best of the herds as His Word said.

God decried the greedy so-called ‘shepherds’ of Israel through the mouth and pen of Isaiah.

Isa 56:9-12

- 9 All ye beasts of the field, come to devour, yea, all ye beasts in the forest.
- 10 His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber.
- 11 Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter.
- 12 Come ye, say they, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant. KJV

You will recall the two incidents of Jesus chasing the money changers and those who sold animals out of the Temple. It was because they were profiting unjustly from the worshipers who would come there and thus polluting the worship of God.

And, now, here at Ephesus, we have the same principle at work. Once Religion has become monetized, no matter how accurate it was in the beginning, it is hopelessly corrupted. If you carefully read the story of Balaam and Balak you will find that originally Balaam was committed to do and say only that which God told him. And, for a while, he was faithful to that. But ultimately he succumbed to his greed and was hopelessly ruined by his love for money.

It is a Biblically affirmed Truism that the love of money is the root of all evil.

1 Tim 6:9-11

- 9 But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.
- 10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.
- 11 But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. KJV

The love of money, as Paul pointed out, has another name, covetousness, which is a violation of the 10th Great Commandment of God. As Paul pointed out, Truth and Covetousness cannot and will not mix. Those who covet also “err from the faith,” and there is no way for it to be otherwise.

Covetousness, of necessity, subverts truth for the one who is ruled by it is a rebel against God, an unrepentant sinner and cannot be a faithful custodian of Truth. The covetous person is not and cannot be a true believer in Jesus Christ.

1 Cor 6:9-10

- 9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,
10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. KJV

What is the true function of religion? Jesus stated it best when He said this.

John 17:1-3

- 1 These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee:
2 As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.
3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. KJV

It is to Know God and His Son. But 'Know'ing requires information, absolutely accurate information, Truth, communicated for no other reason than to fulfill the duty of accurately transmitting it. Neither Truth itself nor the Means whereby it is communicated can be tainted with nor subject to the human desire for profit, i.e. covetousness.

Herein lies the problem. God has chosen human vehicles, or 'vessels,' to carry His truth to those who do not have it. They must eat, have clothes, and be sheltered from the weather, all of which requires money. So, how does the Truth survive the system without being tainted? Only as it is carried and communicated by those who will not shade it in any way for the sake of money. Such people are indeed rare, people such as Paul who made this declaration concerning himself.

Phil 3:7-8

- 7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.
8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, KJV

Men in our day think that religion is to make people feel good and that as such it cannot condemn behavior as being wicked nor call it out as unacceptable to God. In very rapid fashion the governments of the Western world are forcing Christian organizations to move away from standards of morality they have held for a very long time. (I started to say 'religious organizations' but I realized that none but Christian organizations are being targeted.)

But, as I said at the beginning, Truth does not care how you feel. It is not a chameleon that changes colors and shapes to suit its audience. Why was the temple of Diana being abandoned in Asia? It is because Paul was telling the Truth concerning Jesus Christ, concerning sin, concerning idolatry, and proving that, as the silversmith heard correctly, "they be no gods, which are made with hands..." That was Truth, and it still is. No matter who is offended by it, no

matter whose feelings are hurt, no matter, in fact, if the entire human race refuses to accept it. It is still Truth.

True Religion has as its goal the Proper Worship of God and the Acceptable Service to be offered to God. In order for that to happen, those who participate in it must **have** the Truth concerning God and must **handle** that Truth with integrity. This cannot happen when those who lead, teach, and govern the church are covetous people.

If we look carefully at our text we can see the outline of what happens when the influences of money become a part of religion.

1. A Religion affirmation, or set of affirmations, is made. (An image of Diana supposedly fell down from heaven.)
2. People become convinced that they are true. Most often by being lied to but, nevertheless, they accept them as Truth.
3. Those who lead find that there are ways to make money, to profit, from the religion. People will pay handsomely to be told they are in the good graces of a god.
4. The leaders and those who service the religion become financially invested in the continuation of it.
5. Any threat to it becomes a threat to the finances of those who profit from the religion.
6. The original affirmations (Truth, supposedly) are modified as needed to further enhance the profits of those who are vested in its success.
7. Truth matters only so long as it preserves and/or enhances the religion.

I am sure that you can see that in the way things worked out at Ephesus, but can you see how the same principles are working out in the 'Christianity' of our day?

The influence of money is seen everywhere today corrupting the gospel.

For example, there has never been more 'Christian' books for sale. But where is the book that tells people things they really do not want to hear? Where is the book that lays out unvarnished Truth about the compromises of modern Christianity? Where is the book that defends historic doctrinal principles without moderating itself to cushion the 'feelings' of its readers? Where is the book that challenges the downward path of the Seeker Friendly churches?

Those books have been written but they are languishing on shelves because no one wants them and no one will buy them.

Where is the radio or television program that is fully sponsored by those that believe in it and are not constantly appealing for funds or trying to sell something in order to stay on the air? Dare those programs expose the sins of our day? Dare they call out the corrupters of the Gospel message? Why not? Money!

The sin of covetousness has wrecked out churches just like it has wrecked our government.

Money runs and controls everything.

There was a time when the church of Jesus Christ would meet in the woods at night rather than compromise with the powers that be but those days are for the most part over.