

68. Businessmen Stir Up Opposition Against the Gospel

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to examine their lives and confess any secret sins that they have not confessed to the Lord. That way they can enjoy the liberty that Christ wants each Christian to experience. We also saw that the Lord is able to give them the strength to change. Today, we are going to see that the power of the Gospel to change and transform lives may cause businessmen who make their living through businesses that provide services to those who reject Christ will become angry when those people are transformed by Christ because it will cause them to lose part of the income from their businesses.

Acts 19:21-22 says, “When these things were accomplished, 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.’ So he sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, but he himself stayed in Asia for a time.” Paul had seen how the Gospel had changed and transformed many people in the city of Ephesus. As a result, Paul realized that it would soon be time for him to leave Ephesus. His plan was to go and revisit the churches in Macedonia and Achaia and to take the offerings that the saints in those regions had collected to help the needy saints in the city of Jerusalem. Then Paul wanted to go to the city of Rome.

Paul sent Timothy and Erastus to Macedonia. These men were part of the team that was ministering in Ephesus with Paul. They were sent ahead to Macedonia to give the churches in Macedonia a little time to prepare their offerings for the needy saints in Jerusalem. Paul had earlier sent Titus to Corinth to encourage the Christians in that city to prepare their offering that they had promised to send for the needy Christians in Jerusalem. Since these men had been sent to Macedonia and Achaia, Paul stayed in Ephesus for a time to complete his ministry in that city.

We read what happened in Ephesus during that time. Acts 19:23-25 says, “And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: ‘Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade.’” The early Christians were sometimes called the people of the Way. In an earlier verse in this chapter, Acts 19:9 says, “But when some were hardened and did not believe, but spoke evil of the Way before the multitude, he departed from them and withdrew the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.” The Christians were called the people of the Way, because Christ said in John 14:6, “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’” Here, we see that some in the city were getting very upset about the transformation that was happening in the lives of the Christians.

Ephesus was the center of the worship of the Greek god named Diana (Artemis). In fact, the city of Ephesus had built a great temple for the idol of Diana which was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Each year, the city held a great festival to honor their idol and people came from throughout the Roman Empire to worship the idol during this spring festival. A major business in this city was making silver images of Diana to sell to these people who came to worship this idol.

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The power of the Gospel to change and transform lives caused Demetrius and the other silversmiths in the city to become very angry. 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 says, “For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” As people in Ephesus were becoming Christians, they were doing exactly what these verses say. They were turning to God from idols to serve the living and true God. That was why the silversmiths were so angry, because it meant that they could no longer sell their silver images of Diana to those who became Christians.

The making of these silver idols provided a large income to the silversmiths and they did not want to lose that money. As a result, Demetrius called together all of the silversmiths. He reminded them that the thing that had made it possible for them to become prosperous and gain their wealth was the sale of these silver idols. If people stopped worshiping Diana, they would not want a silver image of Diana sitting in their houses and so that was going to hurt the business of these men.

Acts 19:26-27 says, “Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship.” Here, we see that Demetrius decided to make a personal attack on the things that Paul was teaching in order to stir up the anger of the other silversmiths.

Demetrius wanted to get the silversmiths so angry that they would join him in a riot to try and destroy Paul. He reminded them that Paul had already turned away many people from the worship of Diana by his teaching. This teaching was affecting more than just the people in Ephesus. In fact, people throughout the whole Roman province of Asia were turning away from the worship of Diana. As a result, Demetrius reminded the men of three things that he knew would stir up their anger.

First, he reminded them that their trade of making silver images of Diana was in danger of falling into disrepute. The word translated “disrepute” means *to become worthless*. He had already reminded the men that they had gained their wealth from the sale of the silver images of Diana. Here, Demetrius told them that those images would become worthless and no one would buy them if people continued listening to the teaching of Paul. Then, these men would lose both their wealth and their jobs.

Second, Demetrius said that the temple of Diana would be despised and the magnificence of that temple would be destroyed. Here, we see that Demetrius appealed to the religious beliefs of the silversmiths by telling them that the religion that had provided their wealth would be destroyed. Their temple, which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, would be treated like it no longer had any value. The word translated “magnificence” meant the splendor or glory of their temple. In Luke 9:43, we read, “And they were all amazed at the majesty of God. But while everyone marveled at all the things which Jesus did, He said to His disciples.” Then,

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2 Peter 1:16 says, “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.” In both of these verses, the word is used to speak of the majesty of God. Demetrius tried to compare the temple of Diana to the majesty of God.

Third, Demetrius used the glory of their city as a way to stir up the silversmiths. The reason why Ephesus was such a great city was due to the fact that the temple of Diana was located in that city. People came from all over Asia and even from other parts of the Roman Empire to their city to see the temple and participate in the festival to Diana. These people would stop coming to their city and the city would lose its glory and power. Here, we see that Demetrius appealed to the civic pride of the silversmiths.

Acts 19:28-29 tells us how the silversmiths reacted. Those verses say, “Now when they heard *this*, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, ‘Great *is* Diana of the Ephesians!’ So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions.” Here, we see that Demetrius accomplished his purpose as the men who were silversmiths were filled with wrath. The word translated “wrath” means *anger that boils up*. In Luke 4:28-29, we read, “So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff.” Here, we see that the people in the synagogue of Nazareth became so angry they tried to throw Christ off a cliff, because He said He fulfilled the scripture that He had just read. These men became so angry that they were ready to kill Paul to stop his preaching.

The silversmiths immediately began to shout, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” Soon they had the whole city filled with confusion. They were doing whatever they could to stir up a riot. They immediately rushed into the theater, which was the place where public meetings were held. Since they could not find Paul, they seized Gaius and Aristarchus. These two men were both from Macedonia which is Northern Greece. Since Ephesus was in the province of Asia (Western Turkey today), these two men were considered foreigners by the people of Ephesus. We will see in our next topic more that happened that day. However, we see that the businessmen who made silver images of the idol were the men who started the opposition against Paul in the city of Ephesus.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that business people who make money from false teaching or from various kinds of sin will not be happy when the Gospel begins to transform the lives of people. Such people may do anything to try to protect their riches that they make from false worship or sin. May the Lord richly bless you as you prepare your children for opposition from those who reject Christ.