

The Confusion of Idolatry

1. What one word best describes the scene in verses 23-34?
 - a. Do you see similarities with American culture?
 - b. This riot (v. 28-34) was the second recorded incident in the book of Acts that was provoked by Gentiles. What was the motive behind both these attacks (24,25; 16:16-24)?
2. By the time Paul arrived at Ephesus on his third missionary journey, the city had passed its zenith and was no longer the great commercial center of days past. Once located at the mouth of the Cayster River on the Aegean Sea, the harbor at Ephesus had been filled in due to silt deposits. Excessive lumbering and over-grazing of the land had caused extensive erosion, and repeated attempts to clean the harbor had failed (note: the ancient harbor works of Ephesus now sit behind a swamp seven miles from the Aegean Sea). The inhabitants of the city had begun to rely on other means of financial support. From Acts 19, what things did they turn to for income?
3. With the silting of the Ephesian harbor, the temple of Artemis (Diana) had become the primary basis of Ephesus' wealth and continuing prosperity. Artemis was the grotesque multi-breasted goddess of fertility whom the Ephesians believed had fallen from heaven (v. 25). Located one and one-half miles northwest of the city, the temple measured approximately four hundred by two hundred feet and was one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world. The temple was four times larger than the Parthenon in Athens. It became a lucrative tourist attraction and an important banking center for those who sought the financial protection of the goddess. Christianity did not face fierce opposition in Ephesus until its spread began affecting the sale of silver items. Suddenly things got very ugly! In many ways this attitude is still in place. Token religiosity is okay, so long as it does not result in an adverse financial effect. The minute it does, theological beliefs take a back seat to economic concerns.
 - a. In what specific ways are you sometimes tempted to value material prosperity over spiritual purity?
 - b. What does the Bible call over-valuing "things"?
4. The theater was the largest place for an assembly in Ephesus, capable of holding 25,000 people (remains of this theater can still be seen today). When Paul wanted to go into the assembly, he was restrained (v. 30,31).
 - a. Who did God use to save Paul and his friends?
 - b. Who did God use to save Paul (18:12-16)?
5. Sometimes God's people develop a negative attitude toward the government that God has placed over them; rather than being thankful for civil government, they develop an adversarial attitude toward it. Some believers even refuse to pay their taxes in direct violation to God's Word (Rom. 13:7). God used secular civil government to quell a potentially deadly crowd. The term "town clerk" (v. 35; in Greek, *grammateus*, meaning literally "scribe") was the chief executive officer of the city rather than a city registrar, as his name seems to imply. List three of the reasons town clerk gave that caused the crowd to dismiss in an orderly fashion (v. 35-41).
 - a. What does Romans 13:4 call human governors?
 - b. What should be your attitude toward human government?

Read: Acts 20:17-38

Monday

v. 1-6 — Notice who Paul's companions were at this juncture of his third missionary journey: Sopater (Berean), Aristarchus and Secundus (Thessalonians), Gaius (of Derbe), Timothy, Tychicus and Trophimus (Asian) and Luke (Greek?). It seems that God would raise up helpers for Paul in most of the cities that he visited on his journeys. In this passage, what specific ministry do these men do for Paul (v. 5)? Take a few moments to consider how God might use you to be of help to a missionary or other Christian worker.

Tuesday

v. 7-12 — The church came together on the first day of the week (Sunday). How long was Paul's sermon (v. 7, 11)? It is hard to fault young Eutychus for falling asleep, but now no preacher can ever say: "No one ever died by listening to a long sermon." How many American Christians would sit through a twelve-plus hour sermon? One of the marks of the early church was their love and respect for God's Word; pray that God would grant us the same passion for His Word today.

Wednesday

v. 13-21 — How much time did Paul spend in Ephesus (Acts 19:8-10)? What things characterized Paul's ministry in Ephesus (v. 18-21)? There is a spiritual bond between every believer in Christ; that love we share grows deeper as we grow in Christ *together*. Notice the deep care and love that Paul showed to the Ephesian believers; their love for him was just as sincere (v. 37,38). Let's work together to build that level of love, unity and care for one another.

Thursday

v. 22-25 — What "things" are dear to you? Notice that the Apostle Paul did not even count his own life as dear, Paul was so led by the Spirit that he went to Jerusalem even though he knew it meant harsh persecution and eventual death; the apostle Paul was determined to run this last leg of his race (life) with the same "Christ focus" he had lived by earlier. Why do Christians have a tendency lose their "zeal" for the Lord? I think some of the reason goes back to the question, "What things are dear to you?" Those who love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind and strength will find it much easier to finish the race with joy. Today is a good day for some self-examination. We have before us the testimony of one of God's most faithful and beloved servants. Ask the Lord to point out any area in your life where the "things" of this world have taken over His rightful place in your life. Ask Him to help you change that today.

Friday

v. 26-32 — Were there any biblical topics that the Apostle Paul "shied away from"? How much of the Word did he teach (v. 27)? Notice Paul teaches that it is critical to "impart the whole counsel of God" and he directly ties it to protecting the church (people) against heresy. Who is Paul addressing (v. 17,28)? As your pastor, my calling from God is to declare to you the whole counsel of God, even when it hurts or the topic is sensitive (Hebrews 13:17). Your responsibility is to submit to the Word of God. When God's people are accurately teaching and faithfully receiving His Word, the "savage wolves" will have to look elsewhere for prey.

Saturday

v. 33-38 — "It is more blessed to give than to receive." That is definitely a message that runs counter to our culture. Paul is specifically talking about financial giving in this passage, but it applies to every area of life and the greater context is dealing with giving your life in the spiritual care of others. How you view money can be a good "spiritual barometer." If you are tenaciously holding on to "your" money and you often find it painful to give, it is likely an indicator that other areas of your spiritual life are suffering as well. In Malachi 3:8-10, God gives us the green light to "test Him." I encourage you to do so. You will find that you cannot out-give God and indeed, "It is more blessed to give than to receive".
