

Derek French:

In our last programme we were in Ephesus with Paul and his companions in Acts chapter 19. Sadly we learned that there was considerable opposition to the gospel of Christ because Ephesus was the centre of the worship of the idol Diana or 'Artemis', as she is also known.

In Ephesus there were many skilled silversmiths who made carved images of Diana to sell to those who came to worship the idol and in the process they made a lot of money for themselves. They saw the good news about Jesus as a real threat to their livelihoods and so they stirred up trouble and hostility against God's servants, and it was so violent and effective that we read in verse 29, *'Soon the whole city was in uproar.'*

When Paul's companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, were seized by the crowd, Paul wanted to address the people but the disciples and other friends of Paul refused to let him do so, as the situation was extremely dangerous. The crowd really became fanatical and for two hours they chanted, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians!' It really was a dangerous time and could have so easily resulted in the deaths of many of the Christian believers in the city, and also of severe censure for the whole city from the Roman government, who considered rioting as a very serious offence.

But there was one man who acted with considerable wisdom to quieten the situation down. We don't know his name and there's no evidence that he was a Christian believer either, but he acted skilfully and with great integrity and quietened things down. He's described as 'the clerk of the city' and was obviously of high position in the administration of Ephesus, and we can learn much from his actions.

As I said just now, we're in Acts chapter 19 and today we concentrate on verses 35 to 41, but to help us to get the whole picture in our minds, Phillippa Chrispin is going to read from verse 23 and then afterwards, Gerard Chrispin will take us through today's section.

Phillippa Chrispin:

*'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. 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."*

*'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 theatre with one accord, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul's travel companions. And when Paul wanted to go in to the people, the disciples would not allow him.*

*'Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theatre. Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defence to the people. But when they found out that he was a Jew, all with one voice cried out for about two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"*

*'And when the city clerk had quieted the crowd, he said: "Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Zeus? Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly. For you have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess. Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly. For we are in danger of being called in question for today's uproar, there being no reason which we may give to account for this disorderly gathering." And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.'*

Gerard Chrispin:

The 'city clerk' now steps into the picture. His role is rather like a mix of mayor, chief executive of the local council, and magistrate. I will refer to him as the 'mayor'. He is a man of some importance in Ephesus. He represents the city to their Roman overlords. We will consider him more closely soon, but for now see him as he quietens the crowd. His appeal to them is based on the 'fact' that everyone is said to

know the ‘truth’ about Diana, and so ‘ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly.’ He effectively assures the pagan crowd that no one can oppose or resist the established facts known to everyone about Diana. But what supposed facts does he quote?

The mayor claims that Diana is a ‘great goddess’ whose image fell down from heaven to earth, from the god, Zeus. That is why the Ephesians are the guardian of her temple. (This goddess needs to be guarded by her subjects!) He maintains, ‘these things cannot be denied.’ The gospel of Christ is set against such ridiculously mythical folklore, producing such unthinking mass idolatry. The message of Jesus’ sacrificial and substitutionary death and powerful resurrection from the dead must make inroads into such darkness by insisting on repentance from sins and the need for sinners to trust the risen Jesus.

We are not the first Christians having to fight an orchestrated hostile mind-set against the gospel. That is why we must teach the Bible clearly, debate graciously but factually and with conviction, and trust God to bring people to Himself through the preaching of the gospel. That gospel is ‘the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.’ We therefore, like Paul, must never be ‘ashamed of the gospel of Christ.’ When facing myths and misconceptions about the Bible, including supposedly scientific views unsupported by true science and opposed by many scientists, believe your beliefs in the Bible, doubt your doubts, and rely totally on Scripture.

Whether the mayor actually believes the myth about Diana’s descent from heaven, or just goes along with it for a quiet life and personal career advancement, we do not know. It is amazing what unbelievable things outside the Bible are accepted by some educated, intellectual and well-qualified people. Yet bias or closed minds means the same people will not even investigate biblical facts, despite clear evidence of the historical accuracy and truth surrounding them. The Christian message is increasingly dismissed without any honest investigation. Nevertheless, we can learn in other matters from some who would not agree with us in the most important issues of life and death, and of time and eternity. May we always be ready to consider and learn from others! We can now learn much from the shrewd and professional conduct of the mayor in Ephesus as he sets out, and succeeds, to pacify the mob.

Having wrongly bolstered the crowd’s misplaced belief in Diana, the mayor now properly points out that Paul and his Christian colleagues have not robbed the temple or blasphemed Diana. Presumably some have done both of those things before. We assume that is why the mayor mentions them now.

He then points out, in their civilised society, that courts are open for Demetrius and company to raise any appropriate charges through legal representation. Similarly, any other legal matters should be handled ‘in lawful assembly.’ He makes the implied but definite threat that they ‘are in danger of being called in question for today’s uproar.’ He accepts no justification for what he accurately calls a ‘disorderly gathering.’ Demetrius and his colleagues must know that to continue the confused confrontation will lead to further public order offences and probable legal action against them.

Having first got their sympathy, then their ear, and then having warned them about having broken the law, the wise mayor then dismissed the unruly crowd. He does this in a masterly way. We can certainly learn valuable lessons from non-Christians like him!

The Bible says we should pray ‘for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. Christians must fear God and keep the law.

Romans 13:1-7 tells us:

*‘Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil.*

*Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil.*

*Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience’ sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God’s ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour.’*

Christians must not break the law of the land unless to keep it would lead them to break the moral law of God, as stated in the Bible. Though rarely occurring in recent years, as Christianity becomes marginalised, the Bible scorned, and immorality rationalised, condoned and promoted, one fears that the time might come round again when we have to say with Peter and the apostles, 'We ought to obey God rather than men.'