

Acts 19:21-41

Christ and culture

(How does the Gospel impact culture?)

- Opposition to the Gospel came from three institutions in Paul's day.
 1. **Traditional religion** – The Jews. Jewish hostility to the Gospel is present throughout the book of Acts.
 2. **Pagan culture** - The Greeks. In this text we see the pagan cultural reaction.
 3. **Secular government** – The Romans. In this text, Luke seems to demonstrate that Paul's ministry was not out of favor with the Romans so much as the Greeks and the Jews.
- These paragraphs reveal the impact of the Gospel on the environment, and the impact of the environment on Paul and his friends.
 1. In the first paragraph, it is the economy that is disrupted.
 2. In the second paragraph it is the social order that is disrupted.
 3. In the third paragraph it is the Roman government that is in view. It is clear that Luke wants us to understand that Paul's offenses were not to the Roman government.
- The lessons consist of insights into fallen human nature that are represented here.
 1. Money is a sacred and when the economy is affected there will be a reaction.
 2. Emotional reactions can lose contact with rational support.
 3. Hostility toward the Gospel may come from the culture more than the government.
- See apptoteach.org (Theology file #808) for information on the church and culture.

²¹ Now after these things were finished, Paul purposed in the spirit to go to Jerusalem after he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." ²² And having sent into Macedonia two of those who ministered to him, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

The Gospel can be a threat to the economic and religious order.

²³ And about that time there arose no small disturbance concerning the Way. ²⁴ For a certain 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. ²⁶ And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus, but in almost all of Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods {at all.} ²⁷ And not only is there danger that this trade of ours fall into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess **Artemis** be regarded as worthless and that

she whom all of Asia and the world worship should even be dethroned from her magnificence."

- The economic interests of Ephesus are linked to the community's investment in the local temple goddess (Artemis of the Ephesians) a goddess of fertility. Her temple became a local treasury or bank. Artemis of the Ephesians was represented as a women with many breasts. Her origin was associated with a meteorite - vs.35. We do not know for certain what the cult worship of this goddess was like. It may have involved human sacrifice and certainly had strong sexual overtones. Artemis of the Ephesians was an Amazon type goddess of nature and war. Her temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. (This Artemis was a modified form of the Greek Artemis who's counterpart was the Latin goddess Diana.)
- It is significant to note that money and economic self-interest was and still is a sacred part of life and also a test of the object of one's true loyalty and commitment.

Luke 16:11

"If therefore you have not been faithful in the use of unrighteous Mammon, who will entrust the true riches to you?"

I Tim. 6:3-10

"³ If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, ⁴ he is conceited {and} understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, ⁵ and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. ⁶ But godliness {actually} is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. ⁷ For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. ⁸ And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. ⁹ But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang."

Proverbs 3:9-10

"Honor the Lord from your wealth, and from the first of all your produce; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine."

- **Steps to stewardship** (For more information see apptoteach.org {theology file #816})
 1. Transfer ownership of all assets to God.
 2. Cultivate a spirit of thankfulness in all things.
 3. Seek to align your aspirations with God's goals.
 4. Plan your spending (investing) based on God's priorities.
 5. Keep accurate records for evaluation.
 6. Pay all bills on time.

7. Be faithful in little things.
 8. Don't invest the assets of others.
 9. Be generous.
- Some observations :
 1. It is the perceived economic threat of Paul's message that brings a reaction. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. People generally do not object to the Gospel until it effects changes in behavior that threaten their values.
 2. Paul's message involved a critique of some sacred aspects of the culture. Paul understood the response to the Gospel to be more important than the preservation of the economy and the culture.
 3. Paul's message had a reputation of changing the behavior of people who received it. Repentance (changed behavior) was a part of Christian response.

The Gospel can be disruptive to the social order.

²⁸ And when they heard {this} and were filled with rage, they {began} crying out, saying, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" ²⁹ And the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia. ³⁰ And when Paul wanted to go into the assembly, the disciples would not let him. ³¹ And also some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his sent to him and repeatedly urged him not to venture into the theater. ³² So then, some were shouting one thing and some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and the majority did not know for what cause they had come together. ³³ And some of the crowd concluded {it was} **Alexander**, since the Jews had put him forward; and having motioned with his hand, Alexander was intending to make a defense to the assembly. ³⁴ But when they recognized that he was a Jew, a {single} outcry arose from them all as they shouted for about two hours, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

- Luke describes the mob mentality as being irrational in that it has created hostile energy, without a clear rational.
- We should not be surprised at irrational hostility toward the Christian community. As this story will indicate, the greatest hostility may not come from the government but from the local culture.
- Some observations :
 1. The word that best describes this setting is – confusion.
 2. The Jews were trying to distance themselves from the turmoil created by the Gospel.
 3. The people were casting a vote with respect to God. They were opting for Artemis of the Ephesians and not Jesus of the Kingdom of God.

The Gospel should promote respect for proper civic authority.

³⁵ And after quieting the multitude, the town clerk said, "Men of Ephesus, what man is there after all who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is guardian of the temple of the great Artemis, and of the {image} which fell down from

heaven? ³⁶ Since then these are undeniable facts, you ought to keep calm and to do nothing rash. ³⁷ For you have brought these men {here} who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of our goddess. ³⁸ So then, if Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him have a complaint against any man, the courts are in session and proconsuls are {available}; let them bring charges against one another. ³⁹ But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in the lawful assembly. ⁴⁰ For indeed we are in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today's affair, since there is no {real} cause {for it}; and in this connection we shall be unable to account for this disorderly gathering." ⁴¹ And after saying this he dismissed the assembly."

- What should we expect if we preach the Gospel.
 1. We should expect Christian faith to radically effect social behavior.
 2. A good test of true faith will show up in the way we respond to monetary issues that effect us.
 3. Much of the hostility against the Gospel may be irrational.
 4. Secular government is not always an enemy of the Kingdom.

“Thy Kingdom Come” — “. . . in, but not of the world.” Jn.18:36

H. Richard Niebuhr identified **five ways in which the Christian community has related to secular culture**. I have used the same categories here but with slightly different descriptions.

- a. **CHRIST AGAINST CULTURE — Don't get involved in an evil world.**
ANABAPTISTS — The Church is to accept a vulnerable posture of relative noninvolvement in the power structures of the world while building an alternative model society within, but distinct from, the broader world context.
- b. **CHRIST OF CULTURE — Go with the flow.**
LIBERALISM — Culture is the place where the hand of God is at work in the world, therefore Christ's Spirit is in the midst of evolutionary change. The culture is the Kingdom of God. Resurrection = renewal, sin = existential alienation, redemption = liberation, ransom = moral influence.
- c. **CHRIST ABOVE CULTURE — Don't worry about the mundane world.**
ORTHODOX CHURCHES — The Church as the visible expression of the Kingdom of God, exists pretty much independently of the surrounding culture from which it calls people to God.
- d. **CHRIST AND CULTURE IN PARADOX — Live with a foot in both worlds.**
NEW EVANGELICALS — The Church is to see the world as a giant benevolence project while it teaches secular society the ways of God's Kingdom.
- e. **CHRIST TRANSFORMING CULTURE — Expect to reform society.**
RECONSTRUCTIONISTS (a branch of the Reformed Protestant tradition) — The Church is to work to bring about the total Christianization of every area of society and thereby usher in a golden age of justice, peace, and prosperity.
HOLY EMPIRE — There is to be a State-sanctioned Church. The Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Lutheran models in Europe have been examples of this.

How does the Gospel effect a change in the culture?

Evangelicals have been influenced by two models.

Understanding of:	Model #1	Model #2
Christian basis	The Incarnation	The Crucifixion
Sphere of application	The World	The Church
Justice and peace	Social, Political	Spiritual, Personal
Emphasis in ministry	Social action (body savers)	Evangelism, Discipleship (soul savers)
Political philosophy	Liberal	Conservative
The Kingdom	Economic justice, Political power sharing, World peace.	Regenerate, mature, church community.
Basic problem	Systemic evil	Personal sin
Scriptural Support	Parts of Gospels and OT Prophets	Epistles
Problems	Biblical social ethics focus on covenant Community infrastructure not the world.	Over reaction to model #1

To what extent are these models to be exclusive or inclusive of each other?

- It is clear that both models find supportive material in the New Testament.
- Until the early years of the twentieth century the evangelical church was active in social issues but after the liberal churches adopted an aggressive social action emphasis, evangelicals retreated from that sphere.
- The Biblical emphasis seems to be on that salvation of souls not bodies. But it must be remembered that the love of God can not ignore suffering and injustice in the world and especially in the church.
- Critical questions evangelicals must face.
 - a. **What is the meaning of Social Justice?**
 1. Is it “to each according to the person’s merit or demerit” (capitalistic)
 2. Or is it “to each according to a standard of equality” (socialistic)
 - b. **How does “mercy” relate to “justice?”**
 1. The state has a responsibility to promote justice but does it also have a responsibility to legislate mercy?
 2. Is a loving response going to promote justice or mercy?
 - c. **Are Human Beings Individual or Communal?**
 1. In what sense is Adam both male and female in Gen.1?
 2. Does God covenant with individuals or with communities (Israel, the Body of Christ)?
 - d. **How Should the Church be Involved Politically?**
 1. Anabaptists - political critique and alternative communal modeling.
 2. Reformed - subjugating the institutions of the world to the Lordship of Christ.
 - e. **Are the ethical responsibilities of Christians within the covenant community different from their responsibilities outside?**

1. Who is my neighbor?
2. Who is my brother? Is a brother different than a neighbor?
- f. **What is the relationship between Evangelism and Social Justice?**
 1. **Conservative** - Evangelism of the individual is the only really important issue.
 2. **Moderate** - Social Justice is an important visual aid to evangelism.
 3. **Reformists** - Social justice is the mission task of the church in bringing all creation under the Lordship of Christ.
 4. **Radical** - Social justice and evangelism are separate but equal mandates for the church.

For more information see apptoteach.org {theology file #807, #808, #809}