

Introduction

Please open your Bibles to Acts 19 and leave your Bible’s open for our time together. The big idea of my message is that submitting to the Lordship of Jesus means renouncing what is worthless and pledging allegiance to *who* is worthy. There are challenges that come with this process of repentance that are sometimes quite costly.

[Read Acts 19:21-41]. *This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.*

Who are the True Images?

“Who are you?” This is the great question of our cultural moment. Everything is identity. Everything seeks to answer the question: “Who are you?” The question of identity is important, because from identity flows your purpose in life. “Who are you?” If you are a Christian, our answers to that question need to be shaped by the sure and steady anchor of God’s Word. “Who are you?” Our culture offers us answers that exceed the boundaries of what is God-honoring, that lead to a charcuterie board of God-dishonoring purposes in life. “Who are you?” There are a variety of God-honoring answers: I am a Christian; I am a temple of the Holy Spirit; I am a member of the Body of Christ. But there is an important answer to that question every person in this room shares, whether or not you have put your faith in Messiah Jesus. “Who are you?”

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The Bible depicts creation as God constructing his great cosmic temple. The earth was formless and empty, and God spent days 1-3 forming what was formless and spent days 4-6 filling what was empty. God filled on day four the place he formed on day one. God filled on day five the place he formed on day two. God filled on day six the place he formed on day three. There is a beautiful symmetry to creation in Genesis 1.

In the ANE (Ancient Near East), temples were the place where heaven and earth meet, like the middle of a Venn diagram.¹ When temples were constructed for whichever god they were dedicated to, the final aspect before dedicated the space was that an *image* or *idol* was placed in the temple. In the ANE world, offerings and sacrifices were made to the images since the images were the tangible, physical representation of the god of that temple.²

¹ Bible Project, “Heaven and Earth.” Published on YouTube 5/19/14. www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zy2AQIK6C5k.

² Many of the ANE comparisons/contrasts in this section come from John Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016).

At the end of Genesis 1, the final thing God creates in his cosmic temple is humanity in *his* image; male and female he created them (Gen. 1:27). Genesis 2 works out what it means to be made in the image of God. I am painfully over-simplifying this, but one of the forces of emphasis in Genesis 1-2 is that the image of God is the simultaneous sameness and differentness of male and female, both of whom possess the *breath* of God. The Hebrew word for breath is *Ruach*—can you say this word? It’s more fun if you hold your hand about two inches from your mouth. You can feel it. *Ruach* is the divine breath or Spirit of God that is *felt*, not seen.

What is the Purpose of Images and Why is Idolatry Wrong?

“Who are you?” I am an *image-bearer of God* in God’s cosmic temple. There is purpose that flows from that identity. First, as image-bearers of the true God, we creatures are to *reflect* the Creator’s glory throughout all creation. We are to *represent* God everywhere we go. Adam and Eve were commissioned to extend the boundaries of the Kingdom of God from the garden *in* Eden to all the ends of the earth, a task Jesus extended also to his followers.

Second, as image-bearers of the true God, we creatures are to *direct* worship *toward* the Creator; it is the true Creator who deserves any adoration we receive because of any creativity that may exist in us.³ This is in contrast to the myths of the ANE. In the ANE, images *received* worship, but we creatures are not permitted to *receive* worship; we are expected to *direct* worship *toward* the Creator. In Acts 14:15, when the people mistook Paul and Barnabas for Zeus and Hermes, how did they respond? “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them.” Only God is worthy of *receiving* worship.

We see this also in the first and second commandments: You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I YHWH your God am a jealous God...” (Ex. 20:3-5a). It

³ ILLUSTRATION: Prior to becoming an accomplished actor, Sir Anthony Hopkins composed symphonies. Recently, the famed conductor Andre Rieu and the Maastricht symphony performed Hopkins’ waltz. When the elaborate, six-minute piece was completed, the conductor and the symphony took their bow, but only briefly, for then the famed conductor directed his own applause to Hopkins who was sitting in the audience, upon which his whole symphony joined. Then, even the audience changed directions; rather than applauding facing toward the symphony, the audience redirected their applause; a circle formed around Hopkins as the center of gravity. Although the beautiful music was performed by these talented musicians up front, the glory rightly belonged to the author.

is not the *existence* of images that is condemned. Rather, it is *making* and *worshipping* images that are condemned. While these commandments condemn making and worshipping idols, they affirm humanity’s purpose. By making images, we take the place of God who made us in his image. By worshipping images, we take what worthily belongs to God and give that adoration to what is unworthy.

The God-honoring purposes of being an image-bearer begin with *reflecting* the Creator’s glory and *directing worship* to the Creator alone, with our worthiness of being an image-bearer directly tied to our possession of the breath of God. The opposite of these purposes are found in the denunciations of idolatry throughout the OT. Jeremiah twice says, “Every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols, for his images are false; there is no breath in them” (10:14 and 51:17). The psalmist says, “The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; they have eyes, but do not see; they have ears, but do not hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths. Those who make them become [nothing] like them” (135:15-18). Isaiah 44 is an exposé of the lunacy of idolatry, rooted in the fact they are created by human hands, have no breath in them, absorb worship, and steal God’s glory.

Image-bearers are creatures made by the Creator; idolatry attempts to make creatures into creators. Image-bearers possess the breath of God; idols possess no breath. Image-bearers *reflect* God’s glory throughout all creation; idolatry *steals* God’s glory. Image-bearers are to *direct* worship *upward* to the Creator; idolatry absorbs worship *inward*. Idolatry is the inversion of what image-bearing is supposed to be.⁴

Who is the ‘Great’ Artemis of the Ephesians

In Acts 19:23 Luke tells us there was “no little disturbance concerning the Way.” What was the great disturbance? We are introduced to a man named Demetrius, who is an idolater to the goddess Artemis. He gathered his fellow idolaters together and told them what Paul believed. Noticeably strange is the almost total absence of Paul from this sub-narrative. The great disturbance disrupting all of Asia was that Paul was “saying that gods made with hands are not gods” (vs. 26). Demetrius’ great concern was two-fold: first, he and his friends were going to lose a whole lot of money if people started believing this—after all, *theirs* were the hands

⁴ Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and its Inversion* (Downers Grove: IV Press, 2015).

making those gods; and second, the “magnificence” of the temple of the ‘Great’ Artemis of the Ephesians may be counted as the worthlessness it was (vs. 27).

Acts 19 opens the door for us to use the historical evidence pertaining to the Artemis myth to better understand NT writings to believers in Ephesus. We receive great benefit from Acts 19 cluing us into this massive aspect to Ephesian life. Over the last two centuries archaeologists have unearthed so many buildings from the ancient city of Ephesus, which is in modern-day Turkey.⁵ Most of these were preserved due to mudslide and ash from a volcanic eruption.⁶ The Temple of Artemis in Ephesus was more than twice the size of the Parthenon and entirely made of marble; one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. So impressive was this that in the fourth century BC, Alexander the Great’s general Antipater remarked that this temple compared only to the glory of Mount Olympus.⁷ Pausanias from the early second century AD wrote about the gods people worshiped around the world, and by sheer references alone wrote of *only Zeus* more frequently than the ‘Great’ Artemis of the Ephesians.⁸

The Artemis myth sought to overthrow the patriarchy. Ephesus was a feminist’s paradise, unusual in its time, and carried great influence. “Her perpetual virginity was indicative of her freedom from men...and in fact she is still embraced today as a symbol of female independence.”⁹ Anyone anywhere in the world who wanted to worship or sacrifice to Artemis had to go to Ephesus. Ephesians coins are inscribed with the Greek word *neokoros*, which is used in verse 35, describing the city as the “temple-keeper” or “temple-guardian” of Artemis.

The cultural evidence pertaining to the Artemis myth shed great light on the topic of gender in Paul’s writings. Almost all of Paul’s comments on gender are written in his letter to the Ephesians, to Timothy who is *in* Ephesus, and in 1 Corinthians, which was written while Paul was *in* Ephesus. For example, turn to 1 Timothy 1. As the myth goes, Artemis was the firstborn of her mother and was an easy birth. Her twin brother, however, put their mother through the

⁵ Sandra Glahn, “The Identity of Artemis in First-Century Ephesus.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172, Vol. 3, 2015, pg. 316. The temple was destroyed in the third century AD, although the city remained intact until it was destroyed in the seventh century AD. C.L. Brinks, “‘Great is Artemis of the Ephesians’: Acts 19:23-41 in Light of Goddess Worship in Ephesus.” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 71, 2009, pgs. 777, 794.

⁶ Glahn, 317.

⁷ Glahn, 319.

⁸ Glahn, 327-328. Adding to this, one scholar has reviewed every piece of writing in existence today from the region of Ephesus between the first century BC and the fourth century AD (500 years of literature) and approx. 33% refer to Artemis, as astoundingly high number. Daniel Frayer-Griggs, “The Beasts at Ephesus and the Cult of Artemis.” *Harvard Theological Review* 106, Vol. 4, 2013, pg. 463.

⁹ Brinks, 778.

ringer for nine days until Artemis stepped up as a midwife and delivered her brother safely. In that day, the most common cause of death for women was childbirth. Drawing on her own origin story, the premier vocation of Artemis was saving women through childbirth.¹⁰ “As the mother[hood] goddess, Artemis was the source of life, the one who nourished all creatures... [Young women] turned to her as the protector... barren women sought her aid.”¹¹ An historian named Strabo, prominent from the late first century BC until to his death in 24 AD described Artemis at great length, especially her identity as deliverer. Even the name Artemis means to be safe from danger, and so she was called “Artemis our Savior.”¹²

Paul opens his first letter to Timothy “by command of *God our Savior*.” Paul rarely uses the phrase “God our Savior.” The word “Savior” is almost always attached to Christ, yet three times in this short letter to Timothy he says, “God our Savior.” In verses 3-4, Paul instructs Timothy to remain in Ephesus to correct false teaching pertaining to myths in opposition to faith in Jesus. It is apparent Paul has the Artemis myth in mind.¹³ First Timothy 2:3-4 also calls “God our Savior,” but emphasizes that God desires *all* to be saved, not just women.¹⁴

What about Paul’s most debated paragraph, 1 Tim. 2:9-15? I have elsewhere written about this passage to some length, so I’ll simply say that Paul is polemically ripping to shreds every major claim and facet of life in the Artemis myth. Let’s just briefly take three elements from verse 9. Women should dress modestly without elaborate jewelry and without braided hair. In first century Ephesus, immodesty involved sexuality, yes, but more so involved flaunting your social status. “When the average [Ephesian] woman in antiquity stepped outside her home, her apparel and hairstyle sent visual signals to all who saw her.”¹⁵ Artwork from the first and second centuries AD depict Artemis with ornamental jewelry, tattoos of zodiac symbols to demonstrate her cosmic sovereignty, and braided hair.¹⁶ The historian Xenophon from the first century AD writes that there was a “religious expectation that all young women [in Ephesus] should wear

¹⁰ Glahn, 334.

¹¹ Linda Belleville, “Teaching and Usurping Authority,” in *Discovering Biblical Equality*, ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Rebecca Merrill Groothuis (Downers Grove: IV Press, 2004), pg. 220

¹² Glahn, 318, 330.

¹³ Sandra Glahn, “The First-Century Ephesian Artemis: Ramifications of Her Identity.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172, Vol. 4, 2015, pg. 452.

¹⁴ This also seems to be the point of emphasis in the third reference to “God our Savior” in 1 Tim. 4:10.

¹⁵ Glahn, 458.

¹⁶ Glahn, 458; Brinks, 779.

this [braided] hairstyle to show piety to Artemis.”¹⁷ As a sort of coming-of-age, all young women in Ephesus served a minimum of one year in the temple as priestesses.¹⁸

The command against braided hair isn’t really about hair; it was what braided hair represented. “A Christian [woman] whose loyalty had recently shifted from following Artemis to following Jesus...would have faced an adjustment... Refusing to make offerings to the goddess of midwifery as a statement of her faith likely would have caused a wife great anxiety...”¹⁹ “Ephesian women in antiquity had to take bold steps to live out their Christian faith.”²⁰ Is it sinful for a woman to have braided hair? No, rather new believers are commanded to live counter-culturally, reflecting their renunciation of their formerly life.²¹ Braided hair was a blatantly obvious *outward identifier* of the Artemis myth. A modern equivalent would be a former Muslim who converts to Christianity, but continues to pray at the five allotted, daily times, facing east, in Arabic. There’s nothing sinful about praying five times a day, or praying to the east, or even praying in Arabic. However, for a former Muslim, such an act would be a blatantly obvious *outward identifier* of the former life’s allegiances, which would be inappropriate for their new life in Christ. Paul’s command against braided hair is not about hair; it’s that Ephesian women who pledge their allegiance to the Lordship of Jesus must renounce Artemis in *all* aspect of life. Christians, both women and men, should behave like the new creations we are, not like the idolatrous culture of which we are not.

The Costly Nature of Repentance

From the beginning of the Bible to the end, Lordship is a mutually exclusive concept. You cannot bow down to YHWH *and* the golden calf, YHWH *and* Molech, YHWH *and* Baal, YHWH *and* Nebuchadnezzar, YHWH *and* Artemis. You can only submit to the Lordship of YHWH *or* anything else; YHWH will not share his glory with anyone or anything. When we submit to the Lordship of Jesus—who is YHWH made flesh—we renounce any and every other supposed god we have been submitting to. If you’re read through the books of Samuel, Kings, or Chronicles then you know that God’s people have a history of pledging their allegiance to

¹⁷ Gary Hoag, “Demystifying Gender Issues in 1 Timothy 2:9-15, with Help from Artemis.” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 44, Vol. 3, 2020, pg. 246.

¹⁸ Brinks, 783.

¹⁹ Glahn, 468.

²⁰ Hoag, 249.

²¹ Hoag, Gary, *Wealth in Ancient Ephesus and the First Letter to Timothy* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2015).

YHWH, yet still whoring around with idols. There were certain good kings like Hezekiah who destroyed a plethora of idolatry from Israel and Judah, yet some remained.²² I don’t say this to make you question your salvation; after all, if you belong to Jesus, he has assured us “I will never cast you out” (John 6:37). But that doesn’t make idolatry okay either. *All* of us have idols that are stealing glory from YHWH by absorbing our worship, and we need to destroy these idols from our lives.

For women in Ephesus, repenting from worshiping idols made by hands; repenting from worshiping idols with no breath in them; repenting from worshiping Artemis came with a great cost. Their worldview of female-superiority came from the myth’s origin story in which the prototype female came first, and the prototype male brought evil into the world. To renounce the ‘Great’ Artemis of the Ephesians meant a total transformation in worldview. Their culture exalted female-independence. To renounce the ‘Great’ Artemis of the Ephesians meant submitting to the headship of her husband in a marriage where two *equals* became *one-flesh*.

Their society placed its trust in Artemis as their Savior through the deadly act of childbirth. To renounce the ‘Great’ Artemis of the Ephesians meant putting her life in danger. This is all why Paul ends that controversial passage in 1 Tim. 2 by correcting the false teaching of the Artemis myth, first with a summary of creation: “For Adam was formed first, then Eve;” second, a summary of the fall: “Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived;” and this, a summary of the promise of redemption: “Yet she will be saved through childbearing if they continue in faith” (1 Tim. 2:13-15). It is the Seed of Eve, who would be killed by the serpent, but whose resurrection would crush the authority of the serpent, reversing the curse that has plagued us and all creation ever since, including the punishment of great pain in childbirth from Gen. 3. Her faith in Messiah was not a superstition that made it impossible for her to die in childbirth, but it did mean death was not the end of her story as it was in the Artemis myth. Faith in the resurrection of Jesus means we have hope of life with him after death for all eternity.²³ For Christians, death is a mere anecdote in our story, not the final sentence before “the end.” For Ephesian women, repentance came with a cost; every single day they bore the markings of a disciple of Jesus. The world around them knew they were Christians, hated them for it, and persecuted them. The cost of repentance varies from case by case, but there is always a cost, and

²² Of course, Calvin’s famous depiction of the heart as a “perpetual idol factory” comes to mind. (*Institutes*, I.11.8).

²³ See 1 Corinthians 15.

it is normally relational. Sometimes that means losing friendships.²⁴ And although it rarely gets talked about, friendship breakups come with great pain.

The Curious Case of Demetrius²⁵

So, what’s the deal with this guy, Demetrius? This growing movement of Jesus-followers was turning the world upside down!²⁶ “The God of the Christians [was] challenging the power and supremacy of the goddess of the Ephesians.”²⁷ This idolater Demetrius riled up his friends about the significant financial-hit they would take if this movement was not stopped. After all, if people start believing idols made from human hands are worthless, then there goes their business, their livelihood! The people from the entire world will have no need to come to Ephesus to sacrifice anymore; no need to buy an Artemis statue or Barbie-doll.

Because of Demetrius, his fellow-idolaters dragged into the theater two of Paul’s friends. One of these was a man named Gaius, one of the few baptized by Paul (1 Cor. 1:14). Gaius is among Paul’s ministry partners mentioned in Romans 16 along with Priscilla and Aquila, who

²⁴ ILLUSTRATION: The brother of a friend of mine was regularly getting high with some of his friends. He initially got into marijuana to help with anxiety, but it slowly morphed into just something he did with his friends all the time. When confronted about this, he admitted he knew it was wrong and wanted to make a change, but when he told his friends he wanted to keep hanging out but just not smoke, they cut him off.

²⁵ What follows is an exposition of verses 8-20, omitted from this message due to length — In verses 8-10, we get some travel plans of Paul. In verses 11-12, we read of some incredible-sounding miracles of Paul; so contagious was the power of the Holy Spirit in Paul that people were getting healed just by touching his clothing. This is reminiscent of the bleeding-woman receiving healing from reaching out and touching the fringes of Jesus’ prayer-shawl (Luke 8:44) and of lepers receiving healing from the shadow of Peter (Acts 5:15). In verses 13-14, some Jewish exorcists much like Simon from Acts 8 tries to exploit the power of the Holy Spirit for their own gain. But in verses 15-16 the demon they sought to exorcise mocked them, admitting that both Jesus *and Paul* had authority over them, but that these false deliverers had no such authority and took possession of them in such a way that they were publicly shamed. Yet, verse 17 says the name of the Lord Jesus was glorified. Why? It was made clear by the events surrounding the false exorcists that no magic or sorcery could bring about or reproduce the work of the Holy Spirit. Luke “wants to show how the power of the gospel is stronger than, even victorious over the practices of magic” (Dirk van der Merwe, “The Power of the Gospel Victorious Over the Power of Evil in Acts of the Apostles.” *Scriptura* 103, 2010, pg. 80). In other words, the magicians were confronted with the reality that there actually *was* a spirit-world, that there *is* a sovereign-God over all creation, and that their attempts to steal *his* glory by absorbing worship from others was in direct contrast to his very real nature. And they saw firsthand what this Sovereign Creator of the Universe could do. And so, what did they do? In verses 18-19, many former magicians who had pledged their allegiance to the Lordship of Jesus made clear their renunciation from witchcraft and wizardry by burning their dark arts spell-books. We don’t know how many magicians were involved in this book-burning, but Luke tells us this was a voluntary response on their part and the total value of the books they burned amounted to almost 140 years of wages—and that’s just the value of the books! For these magicians, repentance meant sacrificing highly valued material belongings, but it also meant giving up untold amounts of wages from lines of work that were contrary to the Gospel.

²⁶ Acts 17:6

²⁷ Brinks, 791.

Adam called “Gangsters for the Gospel.”²⁸ These riled up Ephesians dragged Gaius and Aristarchus into the theater where they would have been publicly stripped and beaten. This persecution was directed at Gaius because *Demetrius* was concerned about protecting the integrity of the ‘Great’ Artemis of the Ephesians. And then the city clerk convinced them that the riot was pointless, so they went home. Acts 20:1 says that after the riot ended, Paul said goodbye and left. Story over. What?!

So, what’s the deal with this guy, Demetrius? This is a long passage to devote to an individual by name without any closure. What was so important about this guy? Turn to 3 John, a very short letter almost at the end of your Bible. In 3 John, verses 9-10, John writes that his writings are being withheld from a certain church because the leader of that church Diotrephes accepts no authority other than himself. Anyone who says differently is shut down and shut out from the congregation. In verse 11, John instructs the recipient of his letter not to imitate evil; don’t be like the spiritually abusive, my-way-or-the-highway authoritarian Diotrephes. Don’t refuse to welcome your fellow believers; receive them, fully, as fellow believers. In verse 12 John testifies to the recipient of this letter about the authenticity of the faith of Demetrius, apparently adding his voice to many other believers attesting to Demetrius’ faith. Why did Demetrius’ faith need defending? Apparently, the recipient of John’s letter needed some convincing. From verse 1, to whom is 3 John addressed? Gaius! The very man who prompted an extremely public persecution of Gaius in opposition to the Way is now part of the Way himself?! It is incumbent upon Gaius not to be like Diotrephes and hold a grudge for past wrongs but to fully welcome Demetrius as a brother by name.

We don’t get the conversion story of Demetrius; although I’m sure there were great layers of deconstruction he needed to work through. We simply get his before and his after. Demetrius was opposed to the Gospel, for it offended him at the core of his being. Demetrius, “Who are you?” You are an idolater profiting off the spirit of the age; your purpose in life is merely financial accumulation and self-preservation. Don’t you know the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Don’t be deceived: idolaters will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10). But seeds were planted every time Demetrius heard the preaching of Paul, Timothy, Gaius, and likely others who were just being faithful to the Word of the Gospel, which

²⁸ Adam Barngraff, “God’s Word to the Weary.” Sermon from Acts 18:1-23, delivered verbally to the Young Adults at Parkway Community Church in Fairfield, CA on October 10, 2022.

is that Jesus of Nazareth was proved to be the Messiah by his virgin birth, his virtuous life, his vicarious death, his victorious resurrection, and his vindicating exaltation. Those who submit all of yourselves to him alone as your Lord will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, the assurance of the forgiveness of sins, and the promise of life unscathed by sin with him for all eternity. Demetrius, “Who are you?” Such an idolater you were, but you were washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:11); you are a disciple of Jesus, a brother of all who believe. Your purpose in life is to “glorify God and enjoy him forever.”²⁹

The cost of repentance for Demetrius was a break in friendship with all those fellow idolaters. But along with his renunciation of the ‘Great’ Artemis of the Ephesians was his pledge of allegiance to Messiah Jesus, his and our Lord. Demetrius became part of a new community that demolished the hostile, divisive walls of social status, gender, age, ethnicity, and race. Standing in the way of Demetrius living his new life with the Family of God was the reconciliation needed between him and Gaius. But by the glowing terms with which both the apostles Paul and John speak of Gaius, I have little doubt that these two brothers in Christ soon thereafter sang songs of worship together, shared meals and the Lord’s Supper together, cried together when loved ones passed, and rejoiced together when wonderful things happened in their lives, such as the birth of a new child by the grace of their “God *our* Savior.”

All of us have idols we need to kill; idols that are absorbing our worship and stealing glory from God. Pray to God and ask for wisdom and discernment about what is necessary for you to destroy these worthless idols from your life and the Holy Spirit will give you direction. Just remember, if you ask for wisdom and discernment, the Holy Spirit may not tell you what you want to hear. Repentance comes with a cost, but friends, it is so worth it.

Let’s pray.

²⁹ Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A #1.