

## **“The Way of God More Accurately” (Acts 18:24-19:41)**

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*Acts 18:24–28 (ESV)*

<sup>24</sup> Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. <sup>25</sup> He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. <sup>26</sup> He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. <sup>27</sup> And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, <sup>28</sup> for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

I’ve noticed two disturbing trends when people talk about God in public. One trend is to downplay the importance of theology. Instead of talking about God in a specific way, people tend to about God in a vague, general way. So, instead of talking about the importance of the Trinity, or what God has revealed in the Bible, some people say we shouldn’t focus on such things, but just do good works. Someone once told me that Christians in the West were too concerned about their theological opinions. I should have asked, “Is that your opinion?” Some people want to reduce theology to “God is love,” or “God cares about justice.” Now, it’s true that people can be so concerned about the finer points of theology that they never put what they say they believe into practice. It’s also true that “God is love,” and that God is righteous and just and cares about righteousness and justice. But the fact is that in the Bible, the importance of theology is discussed. Some people have wrong views of God that need to be corrected. And I have noticed that when people distill their theology to “God is love,” they often come up with their own definition of what love is. The same is true of justice. Some people say that God cares about justice, but then they cherry-pick which justice issues they want to talk about.

And that leads me to the second disturbing trend we see when it comes to talking about God in public. It is common for all kinds of people to use religious language to advance their own agendas. I have said this before, but it bears repeating: Everyone seems to have their own version of Jesus. There’s the socialist Jesus and the capitalist Jesus, the pacifist Jesus and the

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

war-hawk Jesus, the feminist Jesus and patriarchal Jesus. It is common for people to try to use God to advance their cause. This is a very tempting thing to do, even for the best of Christians.

Today, as we continue to look at the book of Acts, we're going to see false views of God and incomplete views of God on display. We're also going to see an attempt to manipulate Jesus, to use his name as a magical device. We'll learn that false views of God must be corrected and that the name of Jesus should not be manipulated.

So, with that in mind, let's begin. We'll consider the last five verses of chapter 18:

<sup>24</sup> Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. <sup>25</sup> He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. <sup>26</sup> He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. <sup>27</sup> And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, <sup>28</sup> for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

Last week, we saw Paul in Corinth. He encountered a couple named Aquila and Priscilla and he traveled with them to Ephesus. Now, Luke tells us that this couple was able to teach a man named Apollos "the way of God more accurately." Notice what we learn about Apollos. He was a Jewish man from Egypt. He was eloquent. He knew the Old Testament well. He also had heard about Jesus. He was a believer in Jesus. When Luke says he was "fervent in the spirit," that probably means he had the Holy Spirit, the third person of God, dwelling inside of him. That's something that only Christians have. He even spoke and taught accurate things about Jesus. But despite all of that, he needed to be taught more.

We're told that "he knew only the baptism of John." John the Baptist was the cousin of Jesus and the one who announced that the Messiah was coming. His preaching and his baptizing proclaimed the coming of Jesus. We don't know how long his ministry lasted, but it started before Jesus began his own public ministry. It's quite possible that Jews from different parts of the Roman Empire came to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals there, saw John preach, and were baptized by him and then went back to their homes, knowing only his baptism. John the Baptist offered a baptism of repentance. His baptism symbolized the need to be cleaned of one's sin. Being baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit also represents being clean, but it also represents the death of the old self and being risen to new life

in Jesus. When people come to faith in Jesus, they should be baptized. It's a public initiation rite, symbolizing forgiveness and new life. So it represents more than John's baptism.

When Aquila and Priscilla heard Apollos, they must have recognized that he was a powerful teacher. But they realized that he needed to know about Christian baptism. That shows that even gifted, Spirit-filled teachers can continue to learn. Their knowledge of God may be incomplete. Aquila and Priscilla spoke to Apollos privately and corrected him. And then he went to Corinth, where Paul and Aquila and Priscilla had been. God used him to do the work of apologetics in that city. In other words, Apollos opposed wrong views of God that the Jews had and he made the case for Christ from their own Scriptures.<sup>2</sup>

In the next few verses, at the beginning of chapter 19, we see some other men who need to be taught "the way of God more accurately." This time, Paul does the teaching. Let's read Acts 19:1-7:

<sup>1</sup>And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. <sup>2</sup>And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." <sup>3</sup>And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." <sup>4</sup>And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." <sup>5</sup>On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. <sup>6</sup>And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. <sup>7</sup>There were about twelve men in all.

After Apollos left Ephesus and went to Corinth, the apostle Paul arrived. Luke says that Paul found "some disciples." A disciple just means a student, or a follower. Luke doesn't tell us if these men are disciples of Jesus or someone else. When Paul meets them, he asks them if they received the Holy Spirit when they came to faith. (Paul doesn't specify whether they came to faith in Jesus.) They say that they weren't even aware of the Holy Spirit. So Paul asks them how they were baptized. He asks, "Into what then were you baptized?" They say they received John's baptism. I doubt that they were baptized by John, since this is now over twenty years after John the Baptist was killed, and since John the Baptist himself spoke about the Holy Spirit. They probably weren't Jews, because there are mentions of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. It

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<sup>2</sup> Apollos is mentioned in 1 Corinthians a number of times, which shows that he was an important teacher in that city. Paul writes, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1 Cor. 3:6). In other words, Paul brought the message of Christianity to Corinth, Apollos helped reinforce that message, but it was God who was doing the work of bringing people to faith in Jesus.

seems that they had come to believe in the God of Israel, but they didn't know the Messiah had come. So Paul has to explain that John's baptism was one that prepared people for the coming of Jesus, but now Jesus has come. They needed to put their trust in Jesus and be baptized into his name.

Luke doesn't give us a lot of details here, so I assume that Paul told them about Jesus and that they believed this message. We are told that Paul baptizes these men, and at that time, the Holy Spirit came upon them, enabling them to speak in foreign languages and to prophesy, which probably means they declared the excellencies of God. In a way, this is similar to what happened at Pentecost in Acts 2. As I've said before, some of what happens in Acts isn't normative. Some of what happens in Acts is unique to that particular time and place. The pattern that we see later in the Bible is that the Holy Spirit comes upon people at the moment they believe in Jesus. Those two events—the reception of the Spirit and faith—come together. Later, whether very soon or after some delay, believers are baptized.

These two episodes show that knowing Jesus and knowing him accurately is very important. When people say that all religions are the same or when they say that people from different religions can be reconciled to God and experience eternal life, they are saying the Bible is wrong. I say that because if all religions were the same and everyone can be saved by remaining in their own religions, then why would Paul bother to teach these people about Jesus? Why would Aquila and Priscilla teach Apollos “the way of God more accurately”? Why would Paul travel so far to share the good news about Jesus and then strengthen believers in churches he planted if, in the end, none of this mattered all that much?

I think these passages clearly imply that Jewish people who do not believe in Jesus need to put their faith in him. We have seen that time and again throughout the book of Acts. And these passages show that not all faith is the same. Some people want to believe that Christianity and Islam worship the same God. They do and they don't, but mostly they don't. They do in the sense that both Christianity and Islam worship one God. They're both monotheistic. They both claim to worship the God of Abraham. They both speak not only of Abraham, but also Moses and many other figures in the Bible, including Jesus. But that's when they start to part ways. Christianity says God is a Trinity. God is one Being in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Islam teaches that Allah is Unitarian. It claims that God doesn't have a Son. It claims that Jesus was just a prophet, not God. It claims that he didn't die on the cross, and therefore he

didn't rise from the grave. These are not the same views of God. The fact that God is Trinitarian, one Being in three Persons, means that God is inherently relational. God has always been a community of love. In Islam, Allah cannot be loving and relational eternally. He can only be relational after he has created. And, even then, Allah is not depicted as a God of love in the Qur'an. Besides these differences in the doctrine of God, Christianity and Islam teach very different things about salvation. Allah doesn't add a human nature and die for his people. Clearly, these are not the same religions. From the Christian perspective, Allah is a counterfeit God. He is a demonic impostor. Saying that Christians and Muslims worship the same God is like saying Priscilla Presley is married to every Elvis impersonator.

People need to know Jesus. They need to have a relationship with him. They need to trust him, love him, and obey him. If we cover up that truth, we may be keeping people away from the truth that will set them free.

In the next few verses, we see Paul preaching in Ephesus. Let's read verses 8-10:

<sup>8</sup> And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. <sup>9</sup> But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. <sup>10</sup> This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

I should say something about Ephesus at this point. This was one of the largest cities in the Roman Empire, with about 200,000 citizens. It was in the Roman province of Asia, or what is now western Turkey. The city was famous for its worship of the Greek goddess Artemis. The Roman equivalent was the goddess Diana. Ephesus had a very large temple of Artemis, which was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Paul had been in the city briefly the previous year, but when he returned in the year 52, he stayed for a total of about three years. These years were very productive, because many churches in the area were planted, including the church in Colossae, and the other six churches (besides the one in Ephesus) mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3.

Here, we see that Paul does what he always does: He goes first to the synagogue, reasoning and persuading his fellow Jews that Jesus is the Christ, the anointed King, and that the kingdom of God has come. Once again, this shows that Christianity is a rational faith. It can be supported by reasoning, by evidence. It's not a blind faith. Paul is able to speak in the synagogue

for three months, which is longer than usual. But, eventually, he is opposed by stubborn, unbelieving Jews and he has to find another venue where he can preach and teach. So he moves to a lecture hall. He reasons daily in that lecture hall for two years, with the result that all kinds of people, both Jews and Gentiles, hear the word of the Lord.

Not only was Paul able to teach the word, but Paul was able to perform miracles. Or, to put it more accurately, God performs miracles through Paul. This, like Paul's preaching, gets a lot of attention. Some people think that Paul has some kind of magic that they can use, and they try to perform great acts in the name of Jesus. But they learn the hard way that Jesus' name cannot be manipulated. Let's read verses 11-16:

<sup>11</sup> And God was doing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, <sup>12</sup> so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick, and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them. <sup>13</sup> Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." <sup>14</sup> Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. <sup>15</sup> But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" <sup>16</sup> And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

This passage may seem very strange to people who aren't familiar with the Bible. We're told that the clothes that Paul had on while he worked as a tentmaker were brought to sick people, and when they touched these handkerchiefs and aprons, they were healed and evil spirits left them. The Bible teaches that there are evil spirits at work in the world who cause people to be oppressed in different ways, including physically. And this episode reminds us of how Jesus was able to heal people who had merely touched the hem of his garment (Matt. 9:20-22; 14:35-36; Luke 6:17-19; cf. also Acts 5:15). The point is that Paul here is continuing the work of Jesus.

Some Jewish exorcists see what Paul is able to do in the name of Jesus, so they try to drive out evil spirits by saying the name of Jesus. Again, all of this may seem strange, but apparently Ephesus was known for magical practices. It seems that there are certain places in the world where evil spirits tend to be more prevalent. Then again, we can't rule out the presence of evil all over the world right now. It's hard not to come to conclusion that evil spirits are behind terrorist attacks and mass shootings. At any rate, evil spirits were present in Ephesus at this time, and these exorcists assume they can simply copy Paul by speaking the name of Jesus. And then something funny happens. The evil spirits talk to these exorcists and say, "We know Jesus and

we know Paul, but who are you?” Then the demon-possessed man starts to beat them up, and they have to flee. I guess their robes fell off in the process. There’s a bit of irony here. They try to drive out demons by the name of Jesus, and the demons say, “We don’t know your name.”

And this shows that the name of Jesus cannot be said as if it were some kind of magical saying. So many people try to manipulate the name of Jesus by getting him on their side. We saw this in both political conventions, by the way. On the opening night of the Republican National Convention, not one but two prosperity gospel teachers prayed “in the name of Jesus.” The man who closed the first night in prayer, Mark Jones, gave a particularly bad prayer. He made it seem as if Donald Trump were the anointed one of God.<sup>3</sup> But the Democratic National Convention also featured a preacher, the Rev. William J. Barber II.<sup>4</sup> He began by saying, “I’m a theologically conservative, liberal, evangelical Biblicist.” He said he’s a conservative because he’s working “to conserve a divine tradition that teaches us to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God [Mic. 6:8].” He went on to talk about justice, which is great. He talked about the problem of hate, racism, and greed. That’s good. He said, “We need to heed the voice of the Scriptures.” Yes, that’s true. He said that Jesus “called us to preach the good news to the poor, the broken, and the bruised, and all those who are made to feel unaccepted.” He said, “some issues are not left versus right, or liberal versus conservative; they are right versus wrong. We need to embrace our deepest moral values.” Amen. But then he went on to talk only about racism, a higher minimum wage, universal health care, and LGBTQ rights. Not all of those things are necessarily supported by the Bible. If you’re going to talk about justice, you can’t define what is just and unjust. You must go to the Bible. And there is a strong tendency among some to think of justice with respect to only things like race and economics. But justice includes sexuality and marriage. We can’t pick and choose what we like. William Barber said that Hillary Clinton “is working to embrace our deepest moral values.” Hillary Clinton thinks that the unborn human person doesn’t have rights. She is not only in favor of abortion, but she wants public funding for abortion. That’s actually part of the Democratic National Party’s platform. They want our tax dollars to fund abortions.

Christians, we should care about justice and righteousness. But we cannot pick and choose which injustices we’ll get worked up about and which ones we’ll ignore. We have to be

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<sup>3</sup> Hans Fiene, “Why Mark Burns’ RNC Benediction Was Terrible,” *The Federalist*, July 19, 2016, <http://thefederalist.com/2016/07/19/why-mark-burns-rnc-benediction-was-terrible/> (accessed July 30, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> The entire speech can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tbjhzI1g3EE> (accessed July 30, 2016).

against both racism *and* sexual immorality. We have to be against both greed *and* against every form of idolatry. We have to be against both calling names and belittling people made in the image of God *and* against failing to make any moral judgments at all.

Last week I mentioned a man named Russell Moore. He's been a seminary professor, an author, and a leader in the Southern Baptist Convention. He speaks to ethical, cultural, and political issues. And he was invited recently to attend the Justice Conference in Chicago. This is a conference that usually attracts left of center, so-called "progressive" Christians. Some might call these people Social Justice Warriors. In his talk, Moore said that Christians should be concerned about all kinds of justice issues, including caring for people like immigrants and refugees, putting an end to human trafficking and abortion. That last bit shocked the crowd. But so did his claim that being committed to justice means being committed to sexual justice. He said,

If we are silent about what the Scriptures and 2,000 years of Church history has taught us about human sexuality and what it means to be right with God and what it means for children to grow up with both a mother and a father, if we are silent at any of those points then we're really not the justice people, we're really not Gospel people. We're just people who are protecting our platforms and we're just choosing on which one to stand.<sup>5</sup>

When it comes to justice, God won't be manipulated. We can't pick which pet issues we'll take up and which ones we'll ignore. We can't get God on our side. The question is, Will we be on God's side? (See Josh. 5:13-14.) If we're on God's side, we'll admit that we have been unjust. We have not done what is right. We have not done what God wants us to do. If we're on God's side, we'll admit that if God were just, he would condemn us all. But God has a plan to be both just and the justifier of sinful people like you and me. Instead of condemning us all, God the Father condemned God the Son on the cross. Jesus, the Son of God, endured this willingly. He stepped into our place and told us to move aside. Instead of receiving the punishment for our injustices, we can be declared righteous, if only we trust Jesus. That's because he took the punishment for our injustices, even though he is the only person who has ever been righteous. He is the only one who has perfectly done justice, loved kindness, and walked humbly with God. And if we are united to him, then God considers us to be righteous, too.

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<sup>5</sup> Chelsen Vacari, "Russell Moore to Justice Conference: Don't Be Silent on Unborn, Sexuality, and Hell," *Juicy Ecumenism*, <https://juicyecumenism.com/2016/06/05/russell-moore-justice-conference-dont-silent-unborn-sexuality-hell/> (accessed July 30, 2016).

Now, let's go back to the story in Acts 19. After this strange event, when the exorcists were driven out by the demon-possessed man, people hear about what happened. Let's see what they did in verses 17-20:

<sup>17</sup> And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. <sup>18</sup> Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. <sup>19</sup> And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. <sup>20</sup> So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

I have to move more quickly here, but the point is that now, people who had already come to faith started to abandon their old ways. There were people who were magicians who started "confessing and divulging their practices." These were not illusionists like David Blaine. These were, we might say, sorcerers, people who could cast spells by setting a set of words. These words were kept secret. By telling others the secret words, they were giving them up. There were people who had books of magic spells that they burned. The value of all the books amounted to fifty thousand pieces of silver. That was the amount of money that fifty thousand days of labor would earn. In today's money, that might be \$6 million. People were giving up money in order to do what was right, because they had come to faith in Jesus.

This shows that when people come to Jesus, their lives will start to change. Certain practices will have to end. For some people, that might mean changing jobs. I imagine that if some Hollywood actors and actresses came to faith, they might have to turn down some roles, which might cost them a lot of money. A change in belief should result in a change of behavior, even if that change means losing money.

At this point, Luke tells us Paul's plans. He had planned to go to cities such as Philippi and Corinth again, and then to Jerusalem, probably in order to present the money that was being collected by Christians in Philippi and Corinth (see 2 Cor. 8-9) to the Christians in Jerusalem. We read about that in verses 21-22:

<sup>21</sup> Now after these events Paul resolved in the Spirit to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." <sup>22</sup> And having sent into Macedonia two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, he himself stayed in Asia for a while.

While that's an important detail, I want to move on to the rest of the story in Acts 19. Once again, Paul's preaching gets him in trouble. This time, the fact that so many people were coming to Christ and turning away from idols meant that the local idol industry was being threatened. Because of that, one man tries to stir up the city against Paul. Let's read verses 23-27:

<sup>23</sup> About that time there arose no little disturbance concerning the Way. <sup>24</sup> For a man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought no little business to the craftsmen. <sup>25</sup> These he gathered together, with the workmen in similar trades, and said, "Men, you know that from this business we have our wealth. <sup>26</sup> And you see and hear that not only in Ephesus but in almost all of Asia this Paul has persuaded and turned away a great many people, saying that gods made with hands are not gods. <sup>27</sup> And there is danger not only that this trade of ours may come into disrepute but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be counted as nothing, and that she may even be deposed from her magnificence, she whom all Asia and the world worship."

As I said earlier, Ephesus was known for its worship of the goddess Artemis. The temple of Artemis was one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It seems that replicas of this temple were made and sold. One man who made silver replicas was named Demetrius. Here, he rounds up some people in the idol-making business and tells them what might happen. He says that their idol-making is their livelihood, and Paul is persuading people to turn away from idols. Paul was apparently saying that gods made with hands are not gods. You may remember that earlier in Acts, Stephen told some of the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem that God "does not dwell in houses made by hands" (7:48). And Paul said in Athens that God "does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything" (17:24-25). Paul said, "we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man" (17:29). The point is that humans everywhere have tried to make God in their image, but the real God is not like that. We didn't invent him. We didn't create him. He created us. And Demetrius knew that if people came to faith in the true God, they wouldn't buy little replicas of the temple of a false god. He and his fellow idol makers would be out of a job.

This is what happens next. Let's read verses 28-34:

<sup>28</sup> When they heard this they were enraged and were crying out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" <sup>29</sup> So the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed together into the theater, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians who were Paul's companions in travel. <sup>30</sup> But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. <sup>31</sup> And even some of the

Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater. <sup>32</sup> Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together.

<sup>33</sup> Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with his hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd.

<sup>34</sup> But when they recognized that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out with one voice, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”

A mob is formed, and they drag a couple of Christians into the amphitheater. This outdoor theater held almost 25,000 people. It’s likely that many people in the city came to hear what the commotion was about. A number of Christians and even some leaders of the city called Asiarchs urge Paul not to go. They were probably afraid that Paul might be killed by the rioting crowd. We know the crowd was out of control because “most of them did not know why they had come together.”

The crowd may have thought that all the Jews were the cause of the problems in the city. One Jewish man, Alexander, came forward and was going to defend the Jews. He was probably going to tell them that Paul was not associated with the other Jews in the city. But apparently Alexander can’t even speak, because the crowd keeps shouting about Artemis. When the crowd finally settles down, a city official tells them that no one is challenging the worship of Artemis, that Paul and his coworkers aren’t actually speaking against Artemis. This is what happens in verses 35-41:

<sup>35</sup> And when the town clerk had quieted the crowd, he said, “Men of Ephesus, who is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple keeper of the great Artemis, and of the sacred stone that fell from the sky? <sup>36</sup> Seeing then that these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash.

<sup>37</sup> For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. <sup>38</sup> If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. <sup>39</sup> But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. <sup>40</sup> For we really are in danger of being charged with rioting today, since there is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion.” <sup>41</sup> And when he had said these things, he dismissed the assembly.

We don’t know if this town clerk was really a worshiper of Artemis or if he wanted to appease the crowd. He reminds the crowd that the city is known as the keeper of Artemis’s temple. He reminds them that a meteor, supposedly a sign of the goddess, had fallen from the sky. And it seems he doesn’t understand that Paul’s preaching actually would challenge the existence of idols. But he calms the crowd down and says that if anyone has a problem, they can appeal to the

courts and the governor. In other words, he is saying that such things can't be settled by mob rule. He tells them that such activity could get them in trouble with the Roman Empire, which had a habit of putting down any sign of rebellion rather quickly and ruthlessly. And with his words, the mob was dismissed, and Paul was spared.

That is the end of today's passage. What I want us to see is that we need to know "the way of God more accurately." And other people need to know that, too. We must grow in our knowledge of God. To know God, we must read the Bible and we must know how to read the Bible. And we must grow in our obedience to him. That means we need to know how to apply the Bible to all of life, not just the "religious" parts of life.

We also need to know that God cannot be manipulated. Jesus will not be made to fit our agenda. The real question is whether we are going to be on his agenda. That means that we're going to have to honor Jesus as Lord above every other allegiance or form of membership. We can't put our country before Jesus. We can't put a political party before Jesus. We can't put our favorite sports teams or even our family above Jesus. If we put anything or anyone above Jesus, we're making an idol. We're no better and no different than those sorcerers and Artemis worshipers. No false god and no politician and no huckster preacher or salesman will lay down his or her life for you. They can't pay for your sins. They have not conquered the grave. But Jesus has done these things. Let us learn more about Jesus. Let us follow him. Let us speak out about injustice everywhere, even if it's our own sins. And let us tell others about him, whatever the cost.