

Being Faithful in an Age of Envy

Acts 19:23-41

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 10-12-08

Introduction

It seems like one of the biggest topics of conversation that I've been hearing recently has been the massive bailout plan. And I can definitely see why. The confiscation of future wealth from every man woman and child has been so enormous that it was hard to ignore. But what many people do not realize is that this is not a change in Washington's policies of wealth redistribution. All the way back in 1983, Herbert Schlossberg said, "The schemes by which people get economic benefit at the expense of others are almost endless in variety."¹ And he outlined numerous schemes by which money is redistributed to the poor, to the middle class, to the wealthy, to the elite, to internationalists and to various levels of government. Everyone is in on the game – at least everyone in "the know." It is easy to use the power of coercion to satisfy the envy of citizens, and usually the elite behind the scenes benefit from every gift that is given to citizens. In this chapter we will be seeing a city clerk who shames Demetrius and puts a stop to what he was planning. In fact, he shames many modern Christians who are acting less honorably than this pagan city clerk. And what is encouraging to me about this passage is that the economics of envy can be slowed down in even a pagan government. And we will be analyzing some of the principles that are highlighted in this chapter – both humanistic and good. But it is clear that we live in an age of massive avarice, envy and theft. I'm glad that citizens are mad over this bail out. They should be. But it's not the first.

There was the Airline bailout in 2001. The interesting thing about that ATSS Act is that it allowed the Treasury to purchase stocks at below-market prices from any airline receiving a loan guarantee. So its not the first time that there has been attempts at nationalization. Then there was the savings and loan debacle in 1989. The final tab for that bailout was \$220.32 billion. There was the Continental Illinois National Bank and Trust Company bailout that gave the government 80% interest in the company. They eventually divested themselves of it. But in the meantime, there were lots of hands in the till profiting from this Fascism. Before that there was Chrysler Corporation in 1980, the New York City bailout of 1975, Franklin National

¹ Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), p. 110.

Bank in 1974, Lockheed in 1971, and Penn Central Railroad in the 1970's, etc., etc. Those are the more visible and obvious forms of government theft and redistribution and/or citizens trying to use power to help or enrich themselves.

But virtually every Federal agency has massive forms of economic theft inherent in their day-to-day operations. Virtually every sector of life has lined up at the feeding-trough or else benefited in less obvious ways from tariffs, quotas, regulations, grants, agency interventions into the private market, and other hidden forms of inequity. Schlossberg points out that it's not just welfare that is redistribution; so is the government educational industry. Why? Because it is taking money from your pocket to pay for somebody else's education. It is a form of theft. So is inflation; so is our aid to foreign countries; so are green regulations; so is a graduated income tax. Schlossberg said,

It is becoming ever more difficult to cover up the fact that redistribution is a Ponzi game that can pay off old victims only by producing new ones. The moral justifications fade and are replaced by force. As the claims to be championing justice appear increasingly ludicrous, Hayek's warning that the recipients of redistribution can be a racial elite, a party, or an aristocracy, will be seen to be prescient.²

And I highly recommend that you read Schlossberg's book. It's called *Idols for Destruction*. It's on my list of top ten books to read for worldview. If you do not educate yourself on the politics of envy in our country, you will not be able to adequately protect yourself from those politics. It's not that envy is unique to our culture. It is not. Envy has always been present, as we will see in this passage. But, our culture has become much more sophisticated than Demetrius in disguising envy as virtue. That's the troubling thing. That's where envy becomes most dangerous to the public. Evangelicals who promote various forms of socialism as virtue are doing a great evil against God: they are calling darkness "light" and calling evil "good."

We will be seeing that the supposed "helpfulness" of Demetrius was exposed as evil by an unnamed city clerk in verses 35-40 just as the evil of our modern culture has been exposed by radio talk shows. But we should not be fooled into thinking this is an oddball occurrence. America has been full of envy for many years. And envy afflicted Ephesus. So today we are going to take a tiny glimpse at the ugly world of cultural envy.

² *Ibid.*, p. 135.

I. Christianity is Controversial in an era of envy

A. It took over two years for the impact to be felt (v. 23 “And about that time”)

Let's begin at verse 23: **And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way.** The words, “And about that time” indicates that it took more than two years before Christianity began to run afoul of this cultural envy. The reason is three-fold. First, Ephesus as a Roman city had freedom of religion. Second, as a Greek city it had democracy. Those two things allowed a certain measure of pluralism to flourish. As long as Christians didn't negatively impact their lifestyle, there likely wasn't too much persecution. But the third reason is that Ephesus was the third largest city of the empire, and the second largest economy. It took awhile before the economic impact of Christianity began to be felt by the big corporations. But as more and more pagans became Christians, it began to affect the market place. It seems clear from the speech of Demetrius that he has been paying attention to Paul's message, and he has found the source of the diminishing revenues.

I guess I should point out that even though it took more than two years to affect sales. That is phenomenal! That shows a vibrant Christianity! It should not take 100 years before Christianity impacts every level of society. Paul has won businessmen to the faith. In verse 31 he has at least made friends with some government officials. And within two centuries, this was a predominantly Christian city with idolatry no longer a lucrative part of the city's economy. That means that within two centuries, Christianity turned the economic system upside down. Christianity, if it is virile, will influence everything.

B. Dogmatic (v. 23 – the way)

The second thing that we see is that Christianity was controversial. Verse 23 says, “**And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way.**” It was controversial first because it was dogmatic. The Greek does not speak of “a way” but “the way.” This dogmatism was not popular in a pluralistic society like Ephesus. And the dogmatism of the Bible on what is right and what is wrong will become increasingly unpopular in America unless God sends Reformation.

C. Defined (v. 23 – way)

Point C, Christianity was also clearly defined. Unlike modern emergent Christianity, Pauline Christianity stood in opposition to everything else. It was not a synthesis of paganism and Christianity. It was a complete worldview. It was the *Way* that was so controversial. Biblical economics stood in contrast to pagan economics. Biblical politics, business, worship, family, arts, and every other area of life were so clearly articulated, that “the Way” stood out. It wasn’t politically correct. But let me tell you something – because it wasn’t wishy-washy, people knew exactly what to turn to when paganism began to collapse.

D. It strikes at the heart of an economics of envy (next point)

And then point D: the Christianity of Paul struck at the heart of the current economics of envy. Demetrius spoke with scorn of “this Paul,” and his speech showed that he understood how Christianity was incompatible and at war with his worldview and lifestyle. And it is this point of contrast that I want to expand upon for the rest of this sermon. Just see verse 23 as the theme and the rest of the chapter as the amplification of it.

II. Leading features of an economics of envy

A. Greed shows its ugly side when people can’t compete (v. 24-25)

Let me quickly outline seven features in Ephesus that can be found in our own American economics of envy. Greed is the first one. Greed is a universal phenomenon of the heart in every age and culture. In a true free market of economics where contract law is enforced, greed is held in check to some degree, but it is never eliminated apart from God’s grace. But when an economics of envy takes root in a culture (as it had in that ancient democracy), greed’s ugly side begins to manifest itself. Let’s read verses 24-25:

Acts 19:24 For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. [They were all making a killing on this product. Verse 25:]

Acts 19:25 He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: “Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade.

The first thing that Demetrius appeals to is their pocketbook. His concern is not with being better competitors. He doesn’t want to compete.

His concern is not with truth. He isn't concerned with what is lawful. As we will see in a moment, the city clerk points out that what they were doing was unlawful. His driving concern is greed, and it runs roughshod over everything else. He wants to fill his pockets even if it means forcing a confrontation with the democratically elected government. He's the head of a large corporation, and he no doubt thought that he could push his weight around if he got enough people to support his plan. Elected officials are usually afraid of confronting the masses. If he can get the government to establish a monopoly, they will maintain their profits. I think that is exactly what is going on here.

Gary North says,

Greed is a killer. Greed tells men that they are entitled to more than the free market offers to them for their efforts. Greed tells men that they're worth more, always more. So they start looking for ways to 'beat the market,' with its limits of open competition. They start looking for aid from the State.

The politician is in the business of getting re-elected. He must go into the market for votes and buy them. He sells the public what it wants in exchange for votes. If the public wants economic favors, then that's what the politician will sell him. (And when the bill comes due – higher taxes – the politician will then start pitching guilt back at the voter – or paper money.) The public establishes the political currency of its realm; the politician responds accordingly, in order to buy the currency of his realm, votes.

Once this process begins, it is almost impossible to reverse it. One of the few cases in history when it was reversed was in England, from 1845-75, only for a single generation. They tore down the trade barriers, strengthened the gold standard, and allowed capital free flow. The result was an outpouring of productivity. But it didn't last long.³

Why? Because it's hard to resist the lure of a culture of envy. Politicians know that they can profit. Citizens know that they can profit. This was one of the things that most frustrated Oliver Cromwell and made him realize that democracy doesn't work. Everyone had his hand in the till.

In this most recent bailout, everyone wants a piece of the pie, don't they? Massive greed can be seen in the players who benefit from this bailout and the earmarks. Citizens will go along because they think they will economically benefit in their houses and in their stocks. Greed is not checked with our modern system. It used to be held in check, but not any longer. Now hear me - the difference between a true free market and modern

³ Gary North, *Successful Investing in an Age of Envy* (Sheridan, IN: Steadman Press, 1982), pp. 19-20.

America is not the presence of greed. That will always be present in any system. The difference is that once the floodgates of government interventionism are unleashed, there is no check to modern greed other than the threat of force that the city clerk later resorts to in this chapter. Greed and envy are at the heart of our modern problems.

B. Fear (v. 26-27a)

The second thing that Demetrius appeals to is fear. Verses 26-27

Acts 19:26 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.

Acts 19:27 So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute...

Let's stop there for a moment, and we will pick up the rest of the verse under the next point. But what is he appealing to? It is fear of massive economic loss – “**this trade of ours is in danger of falling.**” Isn't that exactly the same thing that is motivating the modern bailout? Fear that our stocks will fall, that the prices of our houses will fall, and that our economy will tank. That makes people willing to do almost anything to shore up their investments. It has made people willing to accept the Fascist promises of current candidates. Citizens may not like everything that the Feds do, and they may complain a great deal, but so long as their home prices are shored up, and the Stock Market is shored up, they are willing to endure tyranny. It was fear that drove Germans to embrace Hitler's solutions. And it is fear that has made the Senate and the Congress pass a bill that I doubt most have even read. The phrase “Trust me,” is the name of the game when fear is the card that is played. Any time you see a great deal of public fear, look for it to be followed by further power-grabs; look for tyranny.

C. Guilt (v. 27b)

The third common theme that we see is guilt. Verse 27 goes on to say, “...**but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship.** He is in effect saying, “If we don't do something about this, we will be guilty of seeing a magnificent culture destroyed.” He was appealing to guilt to promote an economic agenda. And to this day, guilt is similarly used. Guilt can flow from religion, as it did here, or it can flow from other things. Rich people are made to feel guilty for being rich when there are so many poor.

Middle class people are made to feel guilty for being successful. White people are made to feel guilty for being white. Asians are made to feel guilty for being successful in just about everything they do (or at least that is the stereotype). Christians are made to feel guilty for Columbus's supposed destruction of a peaceful Native American civilization. And when you start telling people that they are engaging in historical revisionism about Columbus, and you will be quickly demonized. Americans are made to feel guilty that they have most of the world's wealth. Taxpayers are made to feel guilty that kids are not getting adequate meals. And each of these areas of guilt and many more drive a massive redistribution of wealth in our nation. Guilt is a powerful tool in the tool-chest of modern social planners. R. J. Rushdoony pointed that out so well in his wonderful book, *The Politics of Guilt and Pity*. But it is beginning to backfire into resentment. Much of modern social planning is a humanistic way to cope with guilt. We have a Messiah state that specializes in that.

D. Emotional propaganda (v. 28)

A fourth commonality is propaganda. Verse 28:

Acts 19:28 Now when they heard *this*, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!”

This is exactly the purpose of Demetrius' speech. It was not designed to educate, but to prejudice and enflame a passionate commitment. And this is the way I see many modern political races. Compare the debate between Obama and McCain with just about any debate in the late 1700's or early 1800's and you will see this difference: Those early debates were designed to sway the mind through rational arguments, whereas these latter are shallow propaganda. Modern speeches are made to incite cheering and clapping because when the emotions are kicked into gear people can often be committed to a person without well-grounded reasons. We live in an era of propaganda because so many people have been conditioned to feel rather than to think. Don't think what we are experiencing is anything new.

E. Confusion (v. 29,32)

The fifth commonality is confusion. Look at verse 29:

Acts 19:29 So the whole city was filled with confusion, and rushed into the theater with one accord...

Notice that even though there is confusion, they still rush into action. They still commit themselves to being outraged. They are thinking with their

hormones. And modern citizens often have much the same confusion today. Look at verse 32:

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.

I remember a pretty emotional debate at one of our General Assemblies in the PCA. And after much debate on a motion, the motion was lost. And I was glad, and I thought that was the end of it. But these guys were experts at Parliamentary maneuvering. They knew Roberts Rules inside out, and they introduced the same provision into a quite different looking motion the next day, and that motion handily won. And I talked to some of my friends who voted for it and asked them, “Didn’t you realize that you just voted for what you had argued against the previous day?” And they gave me a blank stare, and asked, “What are you talking about?” It was obvious that they were blindsided along with a majority of others. They had no idea. They were confused. And one old elder got up and said that he himself had been confused, and that he had a great verse to describe General Assemblies. Much to the amusement of everyone, he quoted this verse: “**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.** Well, it provided some comic relief. But the point is that in any large group there is usually a vast middle (upwards of 60-80%) that are easily manipulated because they are confused by what the issues are. This is why a democracy has never worked in the history of mankind, and why America was most definitely not set up as a democracy, but as a republic. There is a vast difference between a democracy and a republic. Unfortunately, America has overthrown her republican and constitutional restraints. So the fifth commonality is confusion.

F. Use of force (v. 29ff)

The sixth commonality is the ever-present temptation to use force. In the case of verse 29 it was mob force: “**having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, Paul’s travel companions.**” But why did they bring them into the theatre? It was to get the democratically elected government to act on their behalf. This is what corporations, special interest groups, minorities, big business, oil and so many organizations have sought to do in America. They know how to legally buy votes. They know how to use advertizing to put pressure on uncooperative politicians. The system stinks and it needs to be changed. These groups try to use the government to

expropriate money from the taxpayer to help pay for their livelihoods and for their mistakes. Examine the earmarks of the past decade and you will be absolutely flabbergasted at the inane projects that politicians attach to any and every bill in order to bring the bacon home to their state. You would think that an emergency bailout plan like the one for Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac would be exempt, but no, any time the Feds dig into your pockets with a gun at your head, you will find special interest groups like these silver smiths asking for favors.

G. Demonized Scapegoats (v. 29, 33-34)

The final commonality that we see is demonized scapegoats. In verse 29, they can't find Paul, so they demonize Gaius and Aristarchus. In verses 33-34 we find a guy who isn't even a Christian being demonized. Apparently the Jews put forward one of their own to explain why the Jews really aren't like Christians. But in an economics of envy, there is always collateral unexpected damage. Look at how they treat this bystander who is just trying to fit within the system. Verses 33-34

Acts 19:33 And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander motioned with his hand, and wanted to make his defense to the people.

Acts 19:34 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!"

Notice that he is not called a Christian, but a Jew. Luke is very careful to distinguish those terms. Well, Jews weren't any more popular than Christians were. But he was demonized. In verse 26 Paul had already been demonized by Demetrius. And this happens all the time today.

In a different situation, Sarah Palin might have been praised by some of the very people who are demonizing her now. I'm no supporter, but at the same time, I don't appreciate the unfairness with which she is being attacked. And all the parties seem to engage in this. Why? Well, a politics of envy always needs a scapegoat to blame. Who is getting blamed for the modern financial mess? They blame the free market (which is ridiculous), an unregulated Stock Market (which is just as ridiculous), high salaries of executives, Bush, Reagan – anyone but the true culprits. We ought not to be surprised at the presence of such things. There is nothing new under the sun. This is the politics of envy. And it appeals to a culture of envy. Socialism and Keynesianism could never survive on its own merits. It can only survive if it constantly fans the flames of such ungodliness.

III. Why democracy is not the answer

A. People want to use government for their own benefit (v. 29)

And I want to make my last two points to be some observations of why a democracy is not the answer to an economics of envy and how this passage hints at the true solution. In a democracy, people will always tend to gravitate to using the government for their own profit. Of course, this happened even in the early America when democracy was hated and called “mobocracy.” It can happen in any system of government. Some early Americans found ways of enriching themselves and/or local governments through Federal involvement. But the more democratic a country becomes, the more citizens will vote themselves from the public purse.

First, in verse 29 we see people rushing to the theatre to get the government to do something. Since their gods were no gods, and powerless, the state began to be trusted. In contrast, when God’s total sovereignty is affirmed, men do not trust any civil government with total sovereignty. They affirm very limited sovereignty for man. But when a nation becomes Arminian, or worse yet pagan, the state automatically tends to become a Messianic state. Why do evangelicals always look to the Federal government as the solution to everything? In the 1700’s the Federal government wasn’t seen as the solution to hardly anything. But it wasn’t a democracy then. In R. J. Rushdoony’s book, *The Politics of Guilt and Pity*, he demonstrates that from Rome to the present, the more democratic a country, the more centralized and divinized the state. Friends, we are living in a time when Washington DC is divinized by even evangelicals. Sure they complain about the government, just as they grumble about the true God. But the Federal government has become the solution to everything – healthcare, mortgages, unemployment – you name it, you will find it in the speeches of both the Democrats and the Republicans. A revolution has happened. We have become a *defacto* democracy and the constitution has been overthrown.

B. Officials are vulnerable (v. 31, 35-40)

A second reason why democracies are not the answer is that officials are vulnerable. Verse 31 says, "**Then some of the officials of Asia, who were his friends, sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater.**" They couldn’t guarantee his protection. They are nervous. Even the exceedingly smooth city clerk in verse 35 has to use great care how he speaks. He has to appear to be in agreement with the people, while using a veiled threat of Roman interference. He is portraying himself as rescuing

them from Roman trouble. Why? Because he doesn't want to get into trouble.

And the same is true today. Any politician who tries to bring true reform – which means cutting all unconstitutional spending, agencies, and programs – will be voted out of office. It will be suicidal. As Gary North pointed out in his book, the politician has to use the currency of his realm – votes. He is vulnerable, and it is rare to find a true statesman who lasts for very long. I think it is a tribute to his district in Texas that Ron Paul has been able to stay in Congress as long as he has. Officials in a democracy are vulnerable, which is why we must oppose mobocracy, and bring our nation back to its constitutional restraints.

C. Official business can change last minute (v. 33)

The third reason is that official business can change at the last minute. Paul, Gaius and Aristarchus were the official business of the meeting, but in verse 33, a totally new subject gets introduced – Alexander - let's take it out on Jews too. Why? Jews were universally disliked, so it was easy to take it out on them.

If you haven't been on the Congress's websites, you ought to snoop around and read. It's amazing how official business changes at the last minute. Often, the earmarks are added after congress has already voted on a different version and while it is being hashed out in committee between the two houses. But earmarks (as universally hated as they might be – at least so long as they are somebody else's earmarks) are insisted upon when it's in our state's interests. So long as we continue to act like a democracy, we will never be able to change this.

D. Public emotionally manipulated (v. 34)

Fourth, unlike a republic, where rulers rule according to the constitution and *not* according to the wishes of the public, a democracy is constantly experiencing an interplay between politicians being manipulated by special interest groups and politicians *themselves* manipulating the public. The emotional display in verse 34 has already been commented on, but I think it illustrates such manipulation.

E. Officials tend to play to prejudices (v. 35)

Verse 35 shows that officials tend to play to prejudices. I doubt he believed a word of what he was saying. Most public officials of that day were not believers in the gods of the time. But his speech is a sickening

pandering to what people wanted to hear. It was effective. But that's the point – he was using their religion to appease them. Look at verse 35: “**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.**” What rot! When you read the writings of the Roman and Greek officials of that day, it is clear that most of them were utter skeptics. They didn't believe that the meteorite that fell was an image of the goddess. They knew someone had carved it out of the meteorite. I'm not saying that politicians always intend to say outright lies, but they are coached to not say certain things they believe and to say other things that will pander to public opinion. It is all staged. It is why a democracy will never work. America was not intended to be a democracy. It was intended to be a republic.

F. Officials tend to play to ignorance (v. 36)

Verse 36 shows this public official also playing to the ignorance of the people. “**Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly.**” He's trying to calm their fears with a lie. Whether it is a 9-11 catastrophe, a Hurricane Katrina, an Iraq War, or the causes of a failing Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, politicians try to sooth an ignorant populace with misinformation and promises that is pandering at best and bald-faced lies at worst. And yet people buy it. They must think that the government really *can* fix everything! And politicians know that no matter how many talk show hosts call them on the question, people will forget. Of course, some politicians want to close down the radio talk shows. But the ignorance of the public is the greatest opportunity for tyranny. If every American could be instructed in the Constitution it would help a bit. It's one piece of the puzzle.

G. Officials tend to play to fears (v. 40)

We've already mentioned officials playing to fears. Verse 40 mentions it again: “**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.**” No one likes to get into trouble. But he was saying, “This city may well get into trouble if we are not careful.” Demetrius was claiming that Paul was a danger to the city, and the city clerk is subtly indicating the Demetrius is now endangering the city. You see, this city had a special status granted to it that benefited the corporations and businessmen enormously. It had a degree of autonomy that most other cities did not. This autonomy would eventually be lost within two hundred years. But here, he is

playing to their fears that Rome might take away this political benefit immediately. So this city clerk is slyly playing on fears. “Do you guys want to lose every benefit that you have had in Ephesus? You think Paul has hit your finances hard? Just wait till Rome hears about this. Let’s just disperse and maybe Rome won’t find out.” That’s the threat.

And both citizens and politicians are driven by fears in a democracy. One of the fears that politicians succumb to is media attack. If the media can say that the politician is inciting hatred, motivated by greed, a racist, or some other accusation, it will often make them back off. But politicians also do it to the public. They tried to railroad public opinion on the bailout with fear. It’s despicable. But it won’t be changed unless we stop acting like a democracy.

H. People are easily used

1. First by Demetrius (vv. 23-34)

And then finally, people are easily used in a democracy. You may think that you control elected officials, and that you will throw the dirty rascals out. But more frequently than not, we are manipulated. In this chapter we see the naïve public used by Demetrius in verses 23-34.

2. Then by the magistrates (vv. 35-41)

Then they are used by the magistrates in verses 35-41. We’ve already covered this territory. But it is worth mentioning that the one thing you can count on bureaucrats doing is to follow protocol (as in verses 38-40) and to keep their noses clean and not offend anyone higher up the chain (as in verse 40). It’s one of the things that Paul later on uses to his own advantage.

IV. What partially limits the problem of an economics of envy?

A. An appeal to objective procedures (v. 38)

But let me give my last point – showing that this passage hints at four things that can indeed limit the problems inherent in an economics of envy. The first is an appeal to objective procedures. Verse 38 says, “**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.**” Demetrius was not following protocol. Of course, by itself this won’t help, because even protocol can be used to redistribute wealth. But it does put a damper on the proceedings. Anything to slow down

the progress of evil is good. Many of the protocols to slow down evil in the Federal Government have long ago vanished, and the remaining ones are under attack as being inefficient. But we want inefficiencies in government. They were deliberately put there by our founding fathers because they didn't trust depraved people in office with too much efficiency. Making Nebraska a unicameral state is arguably unconstitutional. But it is definitely stupid. We have more efficiency in Nebraska, but we have less checks and balances than we had when Nebraska was a two-house republic.

B. A process to enforce contract law (vv. 37-39)

Second, the process that was being appealed to was a process of enforcing tort law and/or contract law. I think that is quite clear in verses 37-38. This city clerk must have known that Demetrius didn't have any case in tort law or violation of a contract. Demetrius wasn't interested in a free market or contract law. He wasn't interested in law period. His interest was in using government to further enrich himself.

But this is a critical point in any society. Without true enforcement of contract law a free market cannot last for very long. If a judge can unilaterally change a contract between two parties by lowering the interest rate or lowering the principal (as has been recently talked about), our country is doomed. I think this is perhaps the most dangerous aspect of the Paulson bailout and the other bailouts being proposed by the presidential candidates. As one analyst pointed out, this bailout was "a move that all but destroys contract law." It is despicable!

C. An appeal to a higher law standard (v. 39-40)

The third thing that was used to solve this little crisis was an appeal to a higher standard of law. Granted, it was humanistic law, but it was still higher law that this civic officer could appeal to. And Paul uses higher laws in his own appeals later on in this book. So don't think that just because the higher law is imperfect, that it is not valuable. I will grant that the United States Constitution isn't a perfect document, but it is still valuable. Look at verse 39: **"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."** Notice the phrase, "in danger of being called in question." In question by whom? By Rome. They were violating Roman law. Second, notice the phrase, "reason which we may give to account for this." Who was he accountable to? Even though this was a Greek democracy, they were still accountable to Rome's grace. This city

clerk was subject to a higher law – the treaty signed by Rome. The magistrates in verse 31 were also subject to higher law. It helped to keep them honest.

Whether you think our constitution was secular or not, it still served a purpose of slowing down evil. As long as the Constitution of our nation was enforced, it kept politicians and citizens from effectively using force to redistribute wealth. But once the Constitution began to be ignored, everything was up for grabs. In January of this year, a conservative estimate is that roughly 75% of our budget (2 trillion dollars) was unconstitutional. With all the emergency additions since that time, I'm sure the figure is much higher. This means that we have an utterly unaccountable Congress, Senate and Executive office. The Constitution means nothing. When that happens, you can count on more massive theft in the public sphere. We need to get back to Constitutional restraints. But as long as the citizens are ignorant of Constitution, they can never hold their politicians' feet to the fire.

Conclusion – These all point to the greatest solution – the grace of Christ and the law-word of Christ.

Is there an ultimate solution to this sad state of affairs? Perhaps in God's mercy there will be. Gary North says that he only knows of one case where such a culture as ours has been reversed. I happen to be a bit more optimistic, because nation after nation in the first 1000 years that became Christian got reversed on exactly these issues. I would say that if God Christianizes America once again, His grace could indeed solve this problem of institutionalized envy.

But what are we to do if that doesn't happen for another two hundred years? That's what I want to talk about. We could talk about the four G's of God, guns, gold, and groceries. And those aren't bad ideas. Gary North has written a book along those lines. But that's not really what I want to end with. Obviously we need to take precautions when we live in an era of envy. But I am more concerned that you not lose heart. I want to just stick to the example of Paul in Acts 19. What did he do? Should we push for Biblical laws? I certainly think that is a good idea, whether we are successful or not. Paul said that he taught this city the whole counsel of God, and that would include Biblical law.

But when you have been repeatedly robbed by our modern, messianic, Robin Hood state, I am especially concerned that you not get bitter, cynical, disillusioned, or give up on our country altogether. I want you to be like Paul – faithful in the midst of a culture of envy. Let me give you a little bit of

perspective. I have a friend in Zimbabwe that is going through troubles that are thousands of times worse than our own in America. We may quickly become as bad as Zimbabwe, but unlikely. I'm reading this, not to scare you, but to give you perspective. This friend of mine who could easily leave the country, but has chosen to have his family stay there and try to make a difference. But here is another associate's description of what he is facing:

Today I went from one meeting to another using the main streets in Harare - it was pure chaos. The City had no electricity, the traffic lights at all intersections were not working and the traffic was gridlocked. The Police were nowhere to be seen and even as we sat in the traffic a police car drove past - ramped the pavement and drove through the intersection paying no attention to what was going on around them.

ASTRONOMICAL INFLATION

At the Reserve Bank it was the same. They are printing money and creating money in other forms so fast that the inflation rate is no longer calculable. What we do know is that the RTGS rate - that is the rate at which foreign exchange is exchanged in the open market for money transferred by electronic means is moving by the hour. At the beginning of August it was to 1 against the US dollar (after we dropped 9 zeros) and yesterday it was 2,000,000 to 1. Quite a change in 8 weeks! At this rate it will be no less than 10 million to one by next weekend.

FRUSTRATION

Desperate people are queuing for days at the banks and other financial houses to try and get their money out of the system so that they can spend it before it literally melts to nothing. In Gweru last week the main street was almost closed by crowds at ATM's and banks. In Harare literally thousands of people jam every cash outlet. The maximum withdrawal by an individual is \$20,000 a day worth US \$ 0.001 cents.

FRAUD

The Reserve Bank, faced with the escalating consequences of their own ineptitude are now printing

money on plain local bond paper with no security features. The mafia are having a field day and so many counterfeit notes are circulating that people are refusing the new notes. Instead of adopting a carefully crafted plan to overcome these problems and to correct the fundamentals that are driving the system towards collapse, the Governor today simply closed down the RTGS system and I understand even the inter bank system; rendering the only alternative window for payments impassable.

INSANITY

It is illegal to trade in hard currency - you can go to jail for this if you try, it is illegal to change money on the street, you cannot charge a market price for what you sell unless you are willing to risk intervention or worse. Even today there were reports of the government taking action against retailers who were "over charging". Business is unable to pay their staff in cash, they pay them by bank transfer and then watch as half their work force is absent all day standing in queues.

Non-cash forms of payments are rampant - barter is common, the use of fuel coupons with a face value of about US\$30 each is also common tender. The BBC carried a story this week of an auction in Harare where the bids were all expressed in coupons. Most firms are now being forced to sell their goods and services in hard currency - Rand or US dollars even though it is illegal.

GRAND THEFT

Businesses do not bank the money because the Reserve Bank keeps a close watch on any foreign exchange balances in the Banks and simply expropriates them. Crediting the owner of these accounts with local currency at a ridiculous rate of exchange and then using the flow of hard currency to support the life styles of the small elite that is still in charge. ...

Here we are, 4 weeks away from the start of the rainy

season and we have 2 per cent of our fertilizer requirements in stock. All other inputs are virtually unobtainable. The Reserve Bank is handing out expensive farm equipment to Zanu PF fat cats like sweets to a kindergarten, but they cannot provide fuel or seed or fertilizer or chemicals. It's madness.

AGRICULTURAL SUICIDE

Remaining farmers - black and white are being evicted from their farms by Zanu PF heavies such as a Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank and what is left of the once world class tobacco industry is facing extinction. Dairy farmers, pig farms and fruit estates are all facing illegal invasion and disruption of activity. The Police simply respond to appeals for help by saying that they cannot help because "it is political". [By the way, for those of you who want to imitate Gary North and go off to live in the country, keep in mind that the government's long reach goes everywhere, and redistribution cannot be escaped so easily. Anyway, back to this letter:]

TOTAL COLLAPSE

Our retail chains are empty, many stores are closed, the wholesalers are no longer functional and industry is running at 10 per cent of capacity. Power supplies are down to about half of demand, fuel is in short supply and spare parts are unobtainable. All basic foods are virtually only available in the parallel market at very high prices. Although government schools have opened their doors and the children have gone to school - no teachers are at work. ...

MUGABE AND THE UN

In the midst of this chaos Mugabe went on a 10-day spree to New York to make a speech. The cost of a 20-minute opportunity to denigrate the leading nations in the world, the very people who have fed his population for 8 years, was the cost of taking a Boeing 767 to New York and back via Egypt. The 54-member delegation must have cost at

least US\$2 million in allowances and expenses while there.

PARALYSIS

Then on return he wastes another week with no action on the formation of a new government - now 3 weeks since the SADC facilitated deal with the MDC was signed. And remember we have not had a proper government since the 29th March - nearly 7 months. Since Parliament was convened several weeks ago, we have had no government at all. When confronted with the need to make a decision on the allocation of Ministerial portfolios, Zanu PF has been frozen in its tracks like a child confronted with a cobra. Simply not knowing what to do and beginning to realize for the first time that the end of the road is in sight for them.

Obviously we have it good in America! I am confident that we will pull through this crisis and that other crises will arise to replace it. But I read that letter to say that if the economics of envy is not stopped on every level of our society, we are on a suicidal race for an economic cliff (whether it takes weeks, years or decades). I urge you to start preparing yourselves. If possible, get out of debt. If possible have some reserves. It may be years or even decades before things get really serious, but it does not hurt to be prepared. But above all, trust God and be faithful even when unfaithfulness is all around you. Paul did not bail out of his duties simply because an economics of envy was rampant. He continued to serve God faithfully just like my friend continues to serve God in Zimbabwe.

Here is a passage from Psalm 37 that has encouraged my wife and I and given us perspective. God gave this verse to Kathy some weeks ago. Despite complaints in that Psalm about how everything was topsy-turvy in his world, the Psalmist says,

Do not fret because of evildoers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light and your justice as the noonday. Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; do not fret because of him who prospers in his

**way, because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.
Cease from anger, and forsake wrath; do not fret – it only causes
harm.**

The whole psalm gives us such encouragement. It assures us that the meek shall inherit the earth. But in the meantime, I especially want to highlight four points from verse 3:

First, the phrase, “**Trust in the Lord.**” He is in control, and whether God wills for His judgment to fall or he spares us in His mercy, we can trust Him.

Second, “**do good.**” In other words, don’t trust the Lord and do nothing. Be involved. Seek to influence. God might yet prosper what you do for our country’s good. The Psalmist tells us, “**Do good.**” Don’t let cynicism make you stop trying.

Third, “**dwelt in the land.**” Don’t bail out. Don’t be escapist. Be where you can influence. It may be that God will prosper your influence for good.

Fourth, “**feed on His faithfulness.**” God is faithful to His people, and you can feed on his faithfulness. He will sustain you. Men may fail you, but God will not.

Let me repeat those four action items: Trust in the Lord. Do good. Dwell in the land. Feed on His faithfulness. If you take those four points, you will be confident and moving forward like Paul did. And may God receive the glory and advance His cause in our land. Amen.

Being Faithful in an Age of Envy

Acts 19:23-41

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 10-12-08

Introduction

- I. Christianity is Controversial in an era of envy
 - A. It took over two years for the impact to be felt (v. 23 “And about that time”)
 - B. Dogmatic (v. 23 – the way)
 - C. Defined (v. 23 – way)
 - D. It strikes at the heart of an economics of envy (next point)
- II. Leading features of an economics of envy
 - A. Greed shows its ugly side when people can’t compete (v. 24-25)
 - B. Fear (v. 26-27a)
 - C. Guilt (v. 27b)
 - D. Emotional propaganda (v. 28)
 - E. Confusion (v. 29,32)
 - F. Use of force (v. 29ff)
 - G. Demonized Scapegoats (v. 29, 33-34)
- III. Why democracy is not the answer
 - A. People want to use government for their own benefit (v. 29)
 - B. Officials are vulnerable (v. 31, 35-40)
 - C. Official business can change last minute (v. 33)
 - D. Public emotionally manipulated (v. 34)
 - E. Officials tend to play to prejudices (v. 35)
 - F. Officials tend to play to ignorance (v. 36)
 - G. Officials tend to play to fears (v. 40)
 - H. People are easily used
 - 1. First by Demetrius (vv. 23-34)
 - 2. Then by the magistrates (vv. 35-41)
- IV. What partially limits the problem of an economics of envy?
 - A. An appeal to objective procedures (v. 38)
 - B. A process to enforce contract law (vv. 37-39)
 - C. An appeal to a higher law standard (v. 39-40)

Conclusion – These all point to the greatest solution – the grace of Christ and the law-word of Christ.