

## *Theater Attendance and Theatrical Amusements.*

(Apostolic Denunciation of the Stage and its Vanities)

*And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre. (Acts 19:29)*

Question.—*Why is the apostolic denunciation important and wherein does it consist?*

*Answer.*—The Christian faith requires more of believers than a mere adherence to the law of nature, *cf.* Rom. 2:14, 15 *with* 10:15. Mortification, which consists in self-denial, cannot be considered a duty of natural religion, for it is only a matter of prudence and precaution; yet, for the Christian, such has become duty, Col. 3:5. Thus, though it were the case that the stage, and theatrical amusements, were the most innocent and harmless diversion in the world, it may, due to its abuse, become the subject of a divine prohibition, 1 Cor. 7:31; 9:18. It is, therefore, no argument that stage plays and theatrical amusements cannot be condemned by the Gospel, because when well reformed, they would contain nothing contrary to natural morality or good reason, *cf.* 2 Kings 18:4. Furthermore, there should be no doubt that it was (and is) a sin to attend sinful plays and theatrical amusements in apostolic times, *cf.* Jas. 4:17.

*First*, it appears that the apostle Paul declares against the stage and its amusements in his epistle to the Ephesians, Eph. 5:1-7; which is the sight of the theater mentioned in the book of Acts 19:17, 27-31. Now in these words, “filthiness,” (αἰσχροτήτης), any improper or indecorous conduct in action or word or even thought and intent; “foolish talking” (μωρολογία) any speech which betrays that a person is foolish; and “jesting” (εὐτραπελία), any facetious or coarse wittiness or ribaldry designed to provoke laughter; are condemned the dialogues of the dramas, tragedies and comedies of the theater, in the times of the apostles, *cf.* Col. 3:8. From this, we see the apostle, not recognizing a division between venial and mortal sins, sweeping away the dramas, tragedies and comedies of the stage with the same prohibition by which he condemns actual uncleanness, Eph. 5:3, 4. Indeed, the word translated “jesting,” εὐτραπελία, is a word which signifies the buffooneries of the stage and is only used in early Christian literature in a bad sense. Just as public stews, or whorehouses, are condemned, not by name, but by virtue of the law forbidding fornication and uncleanness, Acts 15:20; so, too, this forbidding of the buffooneries of the stage prohibits theater.

*Second*, it is certain that the apostles often mention the stage in a way of condemnation and forbidding, which is translated in our version by the words “reveling” or “rioting,” 1 Pet. 4:3. It is listed amongst the works of the flesh which strive against the Spirit of God in believers, Gal. 5:21. The underlying word is κῶμος, which refers to Bacchanalian festivities, involving theatrical amusements and, often, vulgar, risqué or coarse displays. From this word, and the Greek word for song (ὠδή), is derived our word “comedy.” Comedies,

together with tragedies, made up the entirety of the Greek drama, hence the two muses of *Thalia* (the laughing face of *komos*, or joyousness) and *Melpomene* (the weeping face of *ode*, or singing). Thus, in this word, the apostle takes upon himself to condemn the entirety of the Greek stage and theatrical amusements of his day, *cf.* 1 Tim. 5:20. The apostle elsewhere uses this word to describe the activities of those who walk in darkness, Rom. 13:13. In contrast, the blessed man does not stand in the way of such sinners, Ps. 1:1.

Question.—*Why are the vanities of the theater objectionable, even if “innocent”?*

*Answer.*—*First*, it appears that the vanities of the stage are inconsistent with the apostolic admonition to study that which pertains to the glory of God and the good of our neighbor, 1 Cor. 10:31, 32. Hence, we are to act in accordance with this principle that we live and act to the glory of God, living strictly in accord with his holy will, Phil. 1:11. Likewise, we are to live and act in such a way that we provoke others to seek the glory of God, Matt. 5:16. Thus, the prohibition of giving offence refers to anything that we might do which would cast a stumbling block in the path of others, Rom. 14:13. Now, nothing should be more clear than this, that the vanities of theatrical amusements form no part of that which is calculated to promote the glory of God or the spiritual benefit of men, *cf.* 1 Pet. 4:3, 4. Indeed, the apostle warns against being defiled by a root of bitterness, of which he names two specifically, fornication and profaneness, Heb. 12:15, 16. Yet, these are the very things associated with the theater and its vanities, *cf.* Gal. 5:19-21.

*Second*, theatrical amusements strike against the apostolic admonition to be separate from and not to touch that which is unclean, 2 Cor. 6:17, 18. Certainly it must be the case, that if the apostle takes in the *komos* of the Greek stage, then, by uncleanness, should be understood all the wicked practices and intentions inherent in the filthiness of the stage, *cf.* Eph. 5:4. Sin defiles the mind, the conscience, the will, the affections, the memory, the imagination, *etc.*, Tit. 1:15; so, too, the vanities of the theater, *cf.* 2 Pet. 2:18.

*Third*, theatrical amusements do not contribute to the safety and security of the saints of God, Eph. 6:10-13. Contrary to the apostle, these things are filled with dialogues not designed to edify but to stultify, Eph. 4:29. The counsels of the theater stand contrary to the Psalmist, Ps. 1:1, 2.

*Fourth*, its high esteem amongst the wicked should cast doubt upon its value to the believer in the sight of God, Luke 16:15. Nothing is more plain than this, sinful men are quick to approve one another in their sinful deeds, yet none of this shall go unpunished, Ps. 49:13; Prov. 16:5. Believers should no longer seek to serve the desires of the flesh and the unrenewed mind, Eph. 2:2, 3.

*Finally*, lest any should think himself immune, there should be great care taken, knowing that Satan beguiled Eve through subtlety and corrupted her mind, 2 Cor. 11:3. The amusements of the theater present a subtle avenue through which men’s minds are corrupted and beguiled, 1 Cor. 15:33.