



Wisdom & Maturity – Part 5

Anticipating Culture's Mob Mentality

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Well, there is a classic water park ride that I'm sure many of you or at least your kids have been on. It's usually poorly named, albeit logically named. It's the one where you slide down into one side of a gigantic saucer cone-shaped saucer, and there's water swirling around and you slide around in the slippery surface of the slide. And then you get to the bottom of this portal that makes you plop into the pool beneath. Now, this is sometimes called at waterparks The Vortex. I've seen it named that. Other waterparks call it the Royal Flush, but usually it's just called the toilet bowl ride. And a lot of waterparks have it and there's no fighting it. I mean, just the laws of gravity and the slick surface of the, you know, the cone-shaped saucer, the water gushing and swirling around you, you're going to be drawn through the vortex or flushed down the toilet, if you will.

Now there's another proverbial toilet bowl that all of humanity is inevitably being drawn into. It's one that the psychiatrist will blame on the anterior cingulate cortex of the brain. It's what sociologists will call groupthink or herd mentality. It's what theologians talk about in terms of an inevitable problem of being a son of Adam or a daughter of Eve. It's going to happen because of what's going on in the spiritual realm of this world and we need to be aware of it. The Bible at the very beginning warns us about it and says you need to be careful that you don't get drawn into this vortex.

It's put this way in Exodus Chapter 23 verse 2, where it says, "You shall not fall in with the many to do evil." You shall not fall in with the many. And if you even have to look that passage up, at some point, you can see the things that surround it. You can be just influenced by the fact that the majority of people are doing this. And sometimes you may even have some things that make you think, "Well, maybe this is right." But we shouldn't just go along with the majority. And the Bible says you've got to be careful. You don't stop thinking because, you know, the consensus has been reached out there in the polls. You don't just go along to get along. You don't just shut your mind off and say, "Well, I'm done with this, don't confuse me with the facts because everyone's doing this. I don't want to be out of step with everyone else."

Now, the Bible says, you've got to fight this and you got to be careful. And it's more than just leading to the kinds of mayhem and riots and looting and stuff that we see in the headlines all the time, where people are just rushing in to do what everyone else is doing. If you think about it, it was the tool that was utilized in the most unjust act that's ever taken place in history. And that is if you were to think about the crucifixion of Christ and how the crowds worked, here's how it's put as it's describing the Pharisees before Pilate as Jesus is brought before Pilate. It said the Pharisees stirred up the crowd, right? I think of the Royal Flush. They stirred up the crowds and they started a chant that they should crucify him.

And Pilate tries to present Barabbas because they always released one prisoner who was in custody at the Passover. And so Pilate says, "Well, clearly you want to release Barabbas."



The crowd says, "No, no, no. Give us Jesus. Crucify him, crucify him." And Pilate interjects twice. He says, "What am I supposed to do with the one you call the King of the Jews?" "Crucify him," they just cried out all the more. And then he says, "Now tell me, what crime has he done? I find no evil in him. I mean, what are you guys doing?" And they don't respond. They don't think, they're not going to reason with him. They just simply shout all the more. They cry out even louder. Crucify him. Crucify him.

And then history, it hinges on this which we see all the time everywhere when people in positions of power and in this case Pilate it says just to please the crowd, not wanting to be out of step with them, he concedes. And he says, "Fine, we'll hand him over to be crucified." The groupthink, the herd mentality, what I'll call this morning the mob mentality. We need to be careful that we never just look at it as just some random sociological or biological reality. It's more than sociology, it's more than psychological. This is theological, and it's important for us to understand it.

And it's on display, by the way, here in the passage we've reached in Acts Chapter 19. It's really a shift from the focus on the Apostle Paul in his third missionary journey as he's there in Ephesus. We saw the riot, we saw the guild and the silversmith Demetrius come up with this huge group of people who are now crying out in the passage in verse 28. They're crying out "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians."

And now it shifts to really looking at the crowd. The focus of this passage is looking at what the crowd is doing and how it's acting. And we see these verses starting in verse 29 where we start to recognize the power of the crowd and the groupthink and the herd mentality. We've got to, I think, in our wisdom and maturity in Christ, understand it perhaps better than we do, or at least be aware of it at a level where every day when you read the headlines, when you look at what's going on in the world, you think, I understand what's happening. This is happening because God says these are the elements involved in it.

So let's understand this from the perspective of what we find here in Acts Chapter 19, as we're still in Ephesus on Paul's third missionary journey, we've already seen there's a riot that's starting to form and we see the mob in action. So look at it with me as I read it for you. Acts Chapter 19, we'll start in verse 29. You can just glance at verse 28 where they're crying out, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." "So the city was filled with confusion." Are you seeing any of that on your video feeds lately? "And they rushed together into the theater."

Now remember I said in Ephesus here a quarter of a million people in the city. They always came in pilgrimages to come and worship at the Temple of Diana or the Temple of Artemis. And it was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. You had a theater there. I quoted the number, I think last week, 12,000 people. I've seen anywhere the archeologists talk about and even the excavated remains of the Roman theater there can seat anywhere from 10,000. Some even had it as high, I guess hip-to-hip, depending on how wide your hips are, up to 20,000 people who can assemble in this place in the theater.



And so they are coming together into this main center of town. And look at this strong verb, "They were dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, Macedonians, who were Paul's companions in travel." Now, if they could get their hands on Paul and drag him they certainly would have done that. So Paul was wherever he was, but they found two guys they knew who were with him and the ringleaders, they dragged these two into the arena.

Now verse 30, you can imagine Paul, right? He sees or hears of his co-workers, his co-laborers, his traveling companions getting dragged into the arena. "He wished to go in among the crowd." Let me go. I'm going to go. They're there because of my preaching. Because of what we're doing in our evangelistic efforts. "But the disciples would not let him." As I'm assuming you would, you would say, Paul, let's rethink you going right now. They're mad at you and your message.

"And even some of the Asiarchs..." Now, there's an interesting word and it's really a bit of a mystery. We know this in history, but we don't know much about it. But there were some certain leaders throughout Asia Minor who were key political leaders. And apparently they were hanging out from time to time, sitting under Paul's teaching, learning. They weren't converts. It doesn't suggest that it just says they were his friends, maybe as he lectured in the Hall of Tyrannus, he's made friends with some Asiarchs, and those Asiarchs, these leaders, these political leaders, friends of his, sent to him, they sent some messenger over and they said, "Hey, don't go." "They were urging him not to venture into the theater." So everyone's seeing this chaotic mob, just like you wouldn't want to just walk into a, you know, a riot. You know, I don't think that's good, especially if they're rioting about what you're teaching.

Verse 32. "Now some cried out one thing, and some another," you know, their message wasn't even together, "for the assembly was in confusion." Now there's our word again. We started in verse 29 that it was filled with confusion and we have the same word here, a different form of the word, but same word, same root word, confusion. And I mean that in Greek, of course, in English it's identical. "And for most of them, they did not know why they had come together." Can you imagine a scene like that? Of course you can. Right? You just go on your newsfeeds and see it. Everyone just knows there's something going on and there's a riot going on now, and everyone's in an uproar.

"Now, some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward." Okay? So there's a group within this. Now, this is not a Jewish town, although there's a Jewish contingent and a Jewish synagogue. And they're getting Alexander and pushing him to the front, saying, you've got to get up and talk. "And Alexander, motioning with his hands, wanted to make a defense to the crowd."

Now, what defense did he want to make? Now, here was the thing. The Jewish synagogue was not buying what Paul was preaching. Paul was preaching that there was a messiah in Galilee who was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. And though he was bringing some converts from the synagogue, many of them were not responding. Obviously, the institution of the Jewish synagogue was not buying it, and so he was making a defense of what? "Listen, it's not about us." Paul may be saying that, this sect called The Way might be



saying this but not us, not the Jews. We're not saying this. So Alexander's trying to make some kind of mitigating lecture here to say, I just want you to know that you should not be mad at us, this minority within Ephesus that we are the bad guys. We're not the bad guys. I mean, Paul's the bad guy.

"But," verse 34, "when they recognize that he was a Jew, for about two hours they all cried out in one voice, 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians,'" just like we read in verse 28. So they're like we don't want to hear any of that. We're not even interested in hearing from you. We're going to shout you down now. Now, that distinction that Alexander wanted to make, they weren't buying it. Like the crowd is in an uproar.

Now I want you to look at two words here in verse 29 as we start our first point here in trying to make an observation about the herd or the mob mentality, the words "confusion" and "together." Now I don't want to make too much of the word "together," but we see a lot of this in the passage that the together is clearly directed toward a specific problem, which in this case is the problem of The Way, the problem of Christianity, the problem of Paul, the problem of his message, and it becomes very effective, comes to such a point of opposition that even the Asiarchs friends are going we don't want you to go out there, they're going to kill you.

So there is a "together" that they have. And I just want to etymologically explain to you the word "together." This Greek word "together" in verse 29 is a compound word that just means having the same mind, having the same mind. And literally that's what the word means. Now, that seems to be in contrast to the word "confusion," which of course it is. Confusion means confusion. Matter of fact, if you want to explain confusion look at verse 32 again. One cried out one thing and someone else cried out another. That's called confusion. That word confusion can be translated "tumult" or "disruption." And if you want even more explanation, look at the next line. "And most of them did not even know why they'd come together." Does it look like they're together? No, they're not together. They don't know why they're together. They're saying one thing, they're saying another. And yet they're all of one mind. That's called an oxymoron, right? That's called a strange juxtaposition of contrasting ideas.

I'll put it this way. It's a phrase that we sometimes use because it looks one way, but there's actually something else going on. Here's the juxtaposition of a word that we often use. Let's call it this: an "organized chaos." Have you ever used that phrase? Organized chaos. And what we mean by that is it looks chaotic, it sounds chaotic, but there is some kind of organization to it because it's accomplished its purpose. You might see a group of people in a, you know, just a well-trained group where they scatter around to get things done. And we were watching something like that last night at our house where this group of people all run in different directions, but they're doing something and achieving a goal together. It looks like chaos, but it's not really chaos. It's organized chaos. That's a phrase that we use.

We need to understand this: when it comes to the opposition to Paul and the gospel, when it comes to opposition to God and his people, when it comes to the opposition in terms of God and his revealed truth, it is always organized chaos. It's a sinfully organized chaos. And you ought to expect that not just in the first century in the book of Acts. You ought to expect that in



the 21st century. If you're taking notes, jot that down. Number one, "Expect Sinfully Organized Chaos," because that's exactly what we're experiencing. It's exactly what we're experiencing. We're experiencing organized chaos and it's sinful. You can even add this word, it is satanic organized chaos. And I say that on the authority of Jesus Christ.

Let me give you a couple of passages just real quick. How about in John Chapter 12, Jesus calls Satan, here's a strong word, "the ruler of this world." The ruler of this world. Second Corinthians Chapter 4 verse 4. I quote that one a lot, "the god of this world." The god of this world, "Theos," that's a big word. It's a small "g" in our text because of course, it's not God, the God, the God of the universe, but "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers."

How about this one? First John Chapter 5. "The whole world lies in the power of the evil one." Okay. These passages make very clear that there is a leader of the world. And the world is organized by this evil one, though he's on a leash, though there's an authority over him, though there's a great sovereign triune God who one day will exercise his power, vanquish the god of this world, and he will set up his kingdom on this earth. The reality is, for now, the earth is under the delegated authority, and by that it's not because it's not inherited, Satan doesn't own anything, but he's now causing chaos on the planet. But guess what? His chaos is always organized. Organized chaos.

There's so much going on in our world today, and you can look at it like it's cast as one group saying one thing, one group saying another. And what I'm here to tell you is I think the Bible very clearly theologically says that is all orchestrated. Orchestrated not by men in some clandestine group in Washington, D.C., or some World Economic Forum where they're all sitting there figuring out how to mess up, you know, the target, right? I'm not saying that's how it works. I'm telling you that, though I don't believe in the conspiracy theories that you see on Facebook, I believe in a conspiracy theory that Jesus clearly taught. And that is that there is an organized effort by the enemy of Christianity to make sure that all the component parts that look so chaotic and all the din of voices that are conflicting and it's our world is out of control, you say that right? Out of control. Well, it is out of control. I mean, that probably slips out of your mouth like it slips out of mine when you read the news, you watch the headlines, and you see what's going on. It's like this is out of control. It's out of control. Raise your right eyebrow if you've said that lately. This is out of control. Our society and our culture is out of control.

Well, you say that but it's not out of control. It's in control. It's in control of the enemy. The ruler of the world, the god of this age, the one in which the Bible says the world is under his power. Right? The whole world lies in the power of the evil one. Now, the whole contrast is that we're not under the power of the evil. "Greater is he who is in us than he who is in the world." The idea of the Scripture is "I've chosen you out of the world." John 17. Now the world is run by a spiritual force and we are drawn out of that. So we're the distinctly different called-out group and we're the minority in this world. But here's the thing. The organized chaos is all pointed at us. It's pointed at what we teach. It's pointing at what we believe. It's pointed at what God has revealed. Organized chaos.



I'll leave you with one more passage that I want you to look at with your own eyeballs to kind to drive this home. And I'll give you some sub-points that we see in the passage that I think we can all relate to in the headlines of our world today. Let's start with this passage, Ephesians Chapter 2. I want you to look at this one. So turn in your devices to Ephesians Chapter 2. That's a weird phrase. In the old days we use to say, "Turn in your Bibles" and then you'd hear the rustling throughout the auditorium. You'd hear all these pages turning. Now I hear nothing, and I think you're either sleeping or you're clicking around on your devices. But I'm hoping you're looking at God's word. I want you to look at Ephesians Chapter 2.

Ephesians Chapter 2 is describing, interestingly enough, in the book of Ephesians, as we study Paul in Ephesus, about how all of us as Christians once were. "We were," verse 1, "dead in our transgressions and sins." Are you with me on this text? Ephesians Chapter 2. "Dead in our trespasses and sins in which you once walked," here's verse 2, "following the course of this world." Right? It's more than that. That's what you see on the surface. You were just like everyone else, but you were "following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience." It's not even "on." It's not at work "on." It's at work "in" the sons of disobedience, "among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh."

Now we just thought we were just "carrying out the desires of our body and our mind," doing what we wanted. But the reality is, look at it again in verse 2, you lived in that way, you walked around in that way, you followed the course of this world, the pathways of the world, that you were actually "following the prince of the power of the air." That's a reference to the enemy, to Satan, "the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience."

So I just want to make clear that is a description of Satan having his way in the masses of the world, in the whole movements within culture and he's leading us in a direction that he'd like us to go in. Which I didn't get to the bottom of verse 3, "by nature becoming children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." Because that's what the fallen angels want. That's what the head of the fallen angels wants. There's no redemption for them. There's redemption for us. But Satan doesn't want us to have that redemption. So he's working against the message of redemption. And that's important for us to see.

As a matter of fact, go back to our passage now in Acts Chapter 19. And I want you to look at verse 29 again. Why did they grab Gaius and Aristarchus? Why? Because he's connected with Paul, and Paul is preaching the gospel and anything that's related to the promotion of the gospel that we're going to put down. Letter "A." Just know this: the sinfully organized chaos of this world is always targeting the way of salvation, always "Targeting the Way of Salvation," targeting the way of salvation.

Matter of fact, look at it. I mean, in how many nations of the world is Islam outlawed? Not many. Right? It would be hard to find some. How about how many nations of the world in which Christianity is outlawed? Passing out a Bible is outlawed? Proselytizing, quote unquote, evangelizing is outlawed? How many problems do we have promoting what we believe? You



can't do these things. We're always fighting these battles. We can't promote the Christ of Christianity because that becomes opposed. Opposed on what? On every front. Right?

Now, I'm not saying the sky is falling and that we don't have freedoms in this country that they don't have in other countries. I get that. But you do see the walls starting to close in on us. And I'm saying you see it closing in from every front and it's like it's almost organized. Well, it is organized. It's chaotic, but it's organized. One man saying one thing, one group saying one thing, another group saying another. And I get that. We have all of these different voices, all of these different cultural pressures. It's coming from every direction. I mean, you see with ESG, you see it with the wokeness, you see it with the sexual LGBTQ+ nonsense. All of this, I'm saying is coming from everywhere. But all of it is impinging on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So Letter "A," it's always going to target the way of salvation because there is no redemption for demons. All they want to do is wreak havoc in our world to make sure that you and I, as I just quoted in First Corinthians 4:4, that our eyes are blinded. And if we're trying to get the message out, that's not what they want. And the Bible says there's organized chaos in all of this and we ought to be wise to it if we're going to be mature believers. Of course, so many passages I could point you to but I just want you to think about how at the root of all this Satan opposed Christ himself.

We don't have time to turn there, but at least jot down Revelation Chapter 12 verses 1 through 5. It's an apocalyptic set of verses that are describing Satan's objection and hostility against Christ, against the nation of Israel and against Christ, against the salvation that he brings and against the fact that Satan would want anyone ever responding in repentance and faith to follow Christ. So Satan is against all of that. Now you want to think back in the narrative of history, not the apocalyptic text of the book of Revelation, you can think about the fact that when Jesus was born there was even a satanic movement to try and kill him, right? Herod killing the children in Bethlehem. The whole point of trying to snuff out, as it says in apocalyptic terms in Revelation Chapter 12 as it looks back on the birth of Christ, trying to kill the child. And of course, Herod was the means by which the child was attempted to be killed.

Then when Jesus comes into his public ministry, that's Matthew Chapter 2. Matthew Chapter 4, Satan then takes an opportunity to say I'm going to derail salvation in Christ, and he seeks to put down Christ in the desert by having him compromised. Because if the Son of God could compromise and would compromise, salvation would not be accomplished. And so Satan attacks him. And he's not just done when he's done with that temptation in the desert after the fasting of Christ. It says Satan waited for a more "opportune time" to respond again and to attack Christ. Christ was under attack constantly.

And then when he leaves the message with his followers, Jesus says, you know, "I'm sending you out like sheep among wolves." You just need to know now you're going to be attacked. He says things like this: "If they hated me, they're going to hate you." If the vitriol and the anger and the hostility were pointed toward me, which of course you saw that from my birth to my death, just know the crowds are going to be stirred up against you. Everything that happened in front of Pilate, it's going to happen to you. And he says, they're going to drag you



before the tribunals, they're going to throw you out of the synagogues, all the things that Jesus promised because it's organized chaos, but it's always going to target the way of salvation.

Which, by the way, if you want a peaceful church, go to a church that doesn't believe in evangelism, that never wants to do the work of evangelism, that doesn't want to see the gates of hell pushed back. When Jesus said in Matthew 16, I'm going to go to the cross, and Jesus is there now confronted with this fisherman from Galilee within his band named Peter, and Peter steps in front of him and says, "Never, never, you're not going to the cross." What did Jesus say to him? Do you remember Sunday school grads? "Get behind me, Satan!" That's pretty harsh. But what you're saying "you're putting your minds on the things of man, not the things of God." God's plan is for me to redeem mankind. You're saying I shouldn't go to the cross. "Get behind me, Satan!"

Satan by the way, do you know what the word means? I've said it recently from this platform. "Sāṭān," the Hebrew word, it's just transliterated into Greek, "Satan." And then it's transliterated into English, "Satan." It's the same word but it means if you were to translate it, it means the "adversary," the opponent. And the opponent of Christ is clearly in trying to oppose Jesus and all that he did. And then he turns in that same passage after Peter says, "Hey, you're not going to go to the cross," and Jesus says "Get behind me, Satan," he goes on to say, "Hey, the church, I'm going to build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." In other words, now I'm going to build my Church, I'm going to leave. I'm going to give you the message and you're going to take that message into your culture.

Now, hell is going to put up its barriers so that you don't knock those things down. The conflict comes when you try to promote the way of salvation. You go into this culture, you go into any crevice of this world and say what Jesus said, "I'm the way, the truth, the life. No one comes to the Father except through Christ." Go preach that to people. Say "there's no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." You go talk about the exclusive nature of salvation in Christ, do you think you're going to get pushback? You're going to get pushback from every side, and it's going to be the organized chaos that the Bible says you need to be attuned to and discern as a wise and mature Christian that that's what's going on in our world.

And when you say it's out of control, I get it. I say the same thing. But you need to know theologically, I don't mean that because it is in control. There's a controlled strategy that we need to understand is always going to be pitted against the way of salvation. And it's working, by the way. Talk about if you don't want the conflict, don't share the gospel. I quoted this from the platform before. It's been a year, I think, since this study came out. Millennials, you know, what's that? 22 to 34, whatever, that generation. Half of them in a very reliable survey from a reliable research firm, half of them think that evangelism is wrong, is wrong. Like you should not be pushing your beliefs about God on other people.

I mean the pressure that is now closing in on evangelical churches to shut up, to sit down and shut up, it's working among young people because we don't want to offend anybody. Right?



Jesus said often, if you're offended by that, just wait until "you see me coming in the clouds in glory." There's no way around the hard facts of truth. Truth has hard edges, and the reality is that we need to be willing to proclaim that because there's only one way to be saved.

And my old well-worn illustration of when the ship is listing and I'm telling someone, get out of your stateroom and please come to the lifeboat, which is not going to be as comfortable as it is in your stateroom but if you don't get in the lifeboat you're going to drown. I understand that's not a pleasant message. But it's the message that we have to bring to our generation. It's pushing back the gates of hell as one person at a time comes to submission to Christ, recognizes their sins, and throws himself on the mercy of God. It's not wrong to show the gospel. That's the whole point. That's the whole point. And you know that Satan from every direction will target the way of salvation. And you don't have to be Paul. You can be Gaius or Aristarchus and you're going to be targeted.

Verse 33. "Some in the crowd prompted Alexander," the Jew, "the Jews had put forward. And Alexander, motioning with the hand, wanted to make a defense to the crowd. But they recognized him as a Jew, for about two hours," they shouted him down. Now, as I said, this is not a convert. This is a Jew who goes to represent the Jewish people, the Jewish synagogue, saying, "Guys, we just want to let you know it isn't us." And their response is, "Shut up. We don't care. We don't want it. You sit down. We want to promote what we're promoting."

So I just want to show you that the reality is that it's just not an attack on evangelical Christians saying Jesus is the only way, even though that's the core target, that's the bullseye. But there is a concentric ring around this and that concentric ring around this does not harmoniously comport with what they want to promote. More on that in a minute. But let's think about what it is that they also attack. I mean, they don't mind hitting the nine ring on the target, which is the fact that you are going to get something positive for the enemy if you can attack the context in which the gospel is brought.

And Christianity is brought within the context of Judaism. Judaism is the revelation of God's truth in the Old Testament. And from that truth, we are supposed to look at the prophecies and know that Christianity is the fulfillment of that. Therefore, we are New Testament Christians who affirm the Old Testament truth. Now, you got a lot of people in our society that buy the truths revealed in the Old Testament. They just don't want to get excited about Jesus being my Lord. And so we can still stick with what we call in our culture the Judeo-Christian ethic. And that is something that, but hey, that's good and certainly makes for a kind of the thriving of society and peace and human flourishing and all that the theologians and sociologists talk about, the reality is that's a good thing, and we want that.

Well, here's the deal. That context is also going to be attacked always. It'll always be under the organized chaos of the enemy. It will be targeted as well. I'll put it this way, Letter "B." The organized chaos is always, Letter "B," is going to "Target God's Morality." And God's morality is found in the Judeo-Christian ethic and it is going to be attacked. Do you think it's being attacked today? Do you read the headlines? If your head is not in the sand then you see this, right? Bad. It's bad. You don't have to say they're just against you saying Jesus is the only



way, see your sin and submit to him. It's even the context of pushing the morality of the God who is. That they don't like and they don't want us to have that in our culture. And that is beginning to collapse at an accelerated rate in our country. And you've seen that, right? Raise your left eyebrow this time if you've seen that. If you understand that. I know it's not an interactive crowd, but you're with me on this, right?

You do read the headlines and you should read the headlines at least to know where we're at and to understand the enemy's strategy in our culture. And it's getting worse and there's going to be a targeting of this. And I thought about, you know, do I even need to talk about it? I've got to be careful here. But let me say this. Let me quote two passages for you. Proverbs Chapter 17 verse 15. "He who justifies the wicked and condemns the righteous both alike are an abomination to the Lord." So it is an abominable thing to the Lord when someone takes what is bad and exalts it and takes what is good and degrades it. Okay?

How about this one? Isaiah Chapter 5. If you're really quick to get there you might want to follow along as I read this, verses 20 through 24. Here is how things get even in a, in this case, a Judeo culture that had forsaken the God of that Judeo culture and all of a sudden now the culture pressed in upon Israel and Israel was looking like this. "Woe to those," is the warning and it's going to come. It's going to come with the Babylonian assault on Jerusalem. "Woe to those who call evil good." Do you think that's happening in our day? Who defines evil? God does. And they're saying, well, that's a good thing. "And they call good evil." They do exactly what Proverbs 17:15 says. "Who put darkness for light and light for darkness They put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter."

And you know what they're saying when they do this in the high, lofty ivory towers of our academy and all the smart people who give the TED talks? Verse 21, "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and they're shrewd in their own sight." I mean, no one is more arrogant than today's modern, elite academic liberal who says, here's what we need, we need to free ourselves in the great Western tradition of the Enlightenment. We need to continue to move in the direction of unshackling ourselves from the bonds of this God. And so it is the rejection of the Judeo-Christian ethic. We're just talking about the ethic. We're not talking about the gospel, just the ethic, the context of it, the frame of it. "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, who are shrewd in their own sight."

And then we've got the culture that just is unbridled in whatever you want. "Woe to those who are heroes at drinking wine," it's all about you feeling good, "and valiant men and mixing strong drinks, who acquit the guilty for a bribe." They're about money. They're about partying. They're about getting drunk. They're about feeling good. "And they deprive the innocent of their rights!" Right down to if you look at our abortion epidemic today. Insane. Verse 24, "Therefore, as the tongue of fire devours the stubble," you see the flames they just consume the sawdust and "the dry grass sinks down in the flame." It just wilts. "So their root will be as rotteness, and their blossom will go up as dust." They look like they're succeeding but they're not succeeding. They look like they're the winners. They're not the winners, but "they have rejected," here it is, "the law of the Lord of hosts."



We don't even need to talk about the gospel yet. Let's just talk about the law, the rules of morality, the rules of right and wrong, the objective rules of what it is that is true. "And they have despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people." To quote the Proverbs again. The reality is, if you want a society that's going to function well, that's going to cause for human flourishing in any society. It isn't this one.

All you have to do, I was reading... Did you read the Orange County Register this morning, the front page of the Orange County Register, the article on our birth rates in Orange County and all throughout the States? They're like, "Oh, we're going to have to close a bunch of schools because no one's having kids." You just turn the whole focus even to yourselves and just say it's about us. Then you get the problem that I started with in the intro of my book that I wrote on parenting. You get to the beginning of where we're shutting down schools to open doggy daycares, right? "I'd rather have a dog than a child." That's where we are as a society. And our continued birth rate continues to plummet. As Jonathan Last wrote in his book, *What to Expect When No One's Expecting*, well, you can expect more than closed schools. You can expect a society that continues to spiral down in selfishness and self-indulgence.

Which, by the way, back to our passage, what were they shouting? You don't even need to turn there to remember what they were shouting. "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians." Great is Artemis. For two hours they chanted that. Do you know why they didn't want to hear from the Jews? Because even though they didn't like Paul and Gaius and Aristarchus and all the evangelistic stuff, "we don't want the Jews either because the Jews have their own morality. It's all about God and right and wrong and righteousness. And you know what we want? We want Artemis."

And Artemis, by the way, though I touched on it historically who Artemis was initially and Diana, first the Greek Artemis, and then the Roman goddess. She was the God of hunting and provision. She was also this multi-breasted idol that stood there, this god of fertility. Well, of course, in this particular religious cult you had a complete licentiousness, a willingness to do whatever you wanted. And one of the things that was a part of this, like we saw in the Old Testament false gods, was temple prostitution. And temple prostitution, as we've seen in the Old Testament, is often you taking a temple prostitute and having sex with the prostitute in some kind of act of adoration to the goddess.

Well, in this case, Artemis, the goddess of fertility, it was beyond that. I mean, this was like wild orgies and sex parties and drunkenness. It was complete licentiousness. It was a lot of what I just read in Isaiah Chapter 5. And so when you say, "hey, we don't like the narrow-minded, fundamentalist Bible-thumping Christians, who believe the only way to God is through Christ. We don't like the whole package of morality that comes with it. What we really want is some kind of philosophy, we want some kind of hero who is going to say whatever you want to do is fine.

Letter "C." You just need to know that the organized chaos of this world is always "Promoting Selfish Indulgence," Letter "C." Always promoting selfish indulgence. Always. That's the goal.



Why? Because the head of this thing, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, guess what he's all about? Leaving behind his proper boundaries, what he is supposed to be, what he's supposed to do, and doing what he wants to do. And that's why he appeals to Eve in the Garden. Do what you want to do. If it looks good, you should do it. If it feels good, you ought to engage in it. Do whatever you want. The restrictions of God, nah, don't worry about that. And so he's always going to promote that.

And here we are in the absolutely ridiculous culture that we now live in in America that is foreign to anything our grandparents ever would have recognized. And we're saying what kind of world that we live in where you can do whatever you want, you can be whatever you want, you can think whatever you want and all of us are supposed to bow down and respect that as though it's some kind of doctrine and creed that you're reciting. But that's where we live. And it's all organized chaos, but it's organized. It's sinfully satanically organized chaos. And it's always going to say, come here. Come to the temple of Diana. Come to the temple of Artemis. Come to the temple of X, Y or Z, we looked at idols last week. Whatever the idol is as long as it's about you and it's not about him, it doesn't harsh out your life. It doesn't restrict you. It's not some kind of encumbrance upon your freedoms.

Ephesians Chapter 4. Let me just quickly look at this with you. And I'm amped up this morning. Yeah, well, yeah, you should have heard me last night. They're apparently erasing that. (audience laughing) Ephesians Chapter 4. I want to show you the contrast, the distinction that is laid out here starting in verse 17. Ephesians Chapter 4 verse 17. "Now this I say," Paul says, "and I testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do." Certainly not going to the temple of Artemis. No, don't do that.

Now, here are the aspects of their lives that are affected by the way that they live as they follow along. Right? "Following the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience." How does that work? Well, they're walking "in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, they're alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardness of heart." Now, the predication of this, the foundation of this is the hardness of their heart, "I don't want to do what God says," but look at what it affects, the triad of words here, starting in verse 17. "The futility of their minds." Verse 18, "darkened in their understanding." Right? And then at the bottom of verse 18, "they are ignorant because they got a hard heart." "They're alienated from the life of God, and it's the ignorance that's in them."

So these are all related to our thinking in our minds. I just want you to realize that the smartest people teaching on the smartest, most Ivy League campuses of our culture have the most ignorant, futile, ridiculous, darkened sense of understanding when it comes to even just standing back and thinking logically about what they're saying. It makes no sense. And this is the distinction between Christians who are supposed to say, "That's not me anymore. We don't think that way anymore." Why? Because we're not like them in verse 19. God has done something in our hearts so that we are no longer "callous and giving ourselves up to sensuality and greed and to practice every kind of impurity."



But notice the words here that are important, that phrase "given themselves up." It's not like you were driven to this. No. You chose to volitionally participate in it. Your will was involved in choosing this. But you said, "I want to do what I think will feel good for me." And that becomes a willful choice. Our volition here in this path of following Artemis or whatever self-indulgence is the idol of the day. I am not only darkened in my thinking, I'm darkened in my volition, my will. But he says, "you didn't learn Christ that way" verse 20, "that's not the way you learned Christ -- assuming that you've heard about him and you were taught in him as the truth is in Jesus." And that's why I hope you're going to church to see the distinction to everything else you're hearing all week long. I hope you read your Bible and you see the distinction.

And what are we taught? Well we're taught "to put off our old self, which belongs to your former manner of life." Now again, old self, we're back into verses 17 through 19. What about my former manner of life? It's corrupt through its deceitful desires. You think it's going to be good. You think it's going to cause flourishing in your life, But it's not. It's deceitful. It's a lie, but it's a desire that you have. Here's the thing. Intellect, mind, my will, my volition and then here, my desires. And the good thing about Christianity is we have a renewed mind and we continue to renew it as we go back to the word of God. Right? We're trained in the Scriptures. Our senses are trained in the Scriptures, to quote Hebrews Chapter 5 and to reference and allude to Romans Chapter 12 verses 1 and 2.

The reality is that I am, as a Christian now, also have my, in this particular text, verse 22, my desires transformed. I have a new heart that desires to do the will of God. Now, it doesn't mean I'm not stuck in my old flesh and now there's a battle between my flesh and my heart. I like to put it this way when I talk about the doctrine of regeneration, your CORE desires are transformed. I no longer have these deceitful desires at the core of my being. I'm still trapped in a flesh that hungers for a lot of things I shouldn't have. As Peter said, it's waging war against my soul. But in my soul, in my heart, in my spirit, I'm now driven by God's regenerative work and his resonant Spirit in my own life to want to do the right thing.

That's why, even in the midst of temptation, if I can stop you and say, "What do you really want to do right now?" And you said, "Well, my passions and impulses are craving and crying out for fulfillment." But I said, "What do YOU want? Hey, Christian, what do you want?" The core desires of real Christians are "what I really do like is to please the Lord." And that's why the minute you do what you're not supposed to do, you feel the guilt and you feel it in a way that non-Christians don't because your heart's desire has just been betrayed by your giving in to your fleshly impulses.

But real Christianity, it transforms your intellect, your volition, and your emotions. Right? And in this passage, it talks about the distinction. And we should see that and start to think about how the redeemed thinking, the redeemed volition and the redeemed core desires of our heart stand in stark contrast to what the world is constantly trying to promote. And it's all in organized chaos because the enemy wants to promote it. Jot this down. We don't have time to look at it. But Titus Chapter 2 verses 11 through 14. Titus Chapter 2:11 through 14 reminds us of what God's work within us is trying to accomplish, which is a self-controlled kind of life to



purify us for good deeds, to be zealous for what is good. Renounce the kind of ungodliness that marked our former lives.

Back to our passage, though. Acts Chapter 19. Acts Chapter 19. Now we skipped from verses 29, we skipped from verse 29 to verses 32 through the last line that I just quoted for you. We didn't look at it when I said it, but you know it, "Great is Artemis." So we've covered those. But there are two verses in the middle, verses 30 and 31 that we need to look at and try and see if we can understand in light of the organized chaos of our world. "But when Paul wished to go in among the crowd, the disciples would not let him. And even some of the Asiarchs who were friends of his, sent to him and urged him not to venture into theater." Why? Because the assumption is you're probably going to get killed in the theater. And that wouldn't be good because your point is to be an ambassador and a message of the gospel. Your goal is to beat back the gates of hell, and your mission is that you're going to do that. You're going to accomplish that because God has got work for you to do.

So he is kept from being snuffed out as a voice speaking for the gospel by two groups, the disciples and the Asiarchs. Okay? And what I want to remember is that we are protected in our mission to do our job through two things. You as an individual are protected through two things. It restrains the evil from snuffing you out. I'll put it this way. Number two on your outline, we need to "Be Grateful for Sin's Restraint." Be grateful for sin's restraint. And God is restraining evil. And the first way he does that, Letter "A," is via the Church. The disciples help this in an incalculable way and in a supreme way as an institution. I don't mean church with a small "c." I mean The Church. All of God's work within this world, in the Church, surrounding the world, capital "C," it is the thing that God is working within to providentially continue to bat back the gates of hell within the people who he has assigned for us to reach with the gospel.

I say that in those terms because if you look back at Chapter 18 in Acts which can you turn their super quick. Acts Chapter 18 verse 9, "The Lord appears to Paul one night in a vision. Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent." Do you know what would have silenced him? If he had he gone into the theater. I'm just now guessing because both the church and these governors, they were certainly saying, I think you're going to get killed here. So your tongue is going to stop talking if you go into the theater. So don't. And he is supposed to speak up and keep on speaking. I know he's in Corinth here, but he's got a pathway he's supposed to go down, which is going to include Ephesus. And here's what God promises, "I am with you, and none will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people."

Now, no one's going to attack you to harm you, which means I'm going to make sure you're going to finish your course because I got people who you got to preach to. I have people who you need to, as an evangelist, as an evangelical Christian, you need to reach with the gospel. And I'm going to make sure you do that. And so no one's going to harm you. It doesn't mean that the attack for like pain is not going to be there. Just as a matter of fact look at verse 12. "The Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal." So he's still going to have trouble. But the trouble he's going to be delivered out of and God is going to preserve him and hold back evil so that he can do his job.



And the Church as an institution continues to work within this world. And I should be specific, and this might be worth turning to as long as I'm saying a lot right now. But let's go to Second Thessalonians Chapter 2. There is a restraining work of God, the third person of the Godhead, to hold back evil in this world so that evil does not collapse in on the Church and that the people of God, the individual evangelical Christians, do not get silenced. And I mean that for every country of the world, even in the underground church, even the Christians in North Korea or China, or you can go to any persecuted country in the Middle East and say the Church continues to do its job, even though there are martyrs in the Church, even though individuals at some point finish their task and their course and they can say with Paul before he gets his head lopped off in Rome, Second Timothy Chapter 4, he says, I finish my course, "I have finished the race." God is going to bring me safely into his kingdom. Well, he's about to lose his head, right? His decapitated head is going to roll on the ground in Rome.

But here's the deal. He will have reached everyone who God has ordained him to reach with the gospel. He's going to continue until it's over. And he knows in Second Timothy 4, it's almost over. Well, in this particular passage we have in Second Thessalonians Chapter 2 the reminder that God is continuing to restrain evil in this world so that it doesn't overrun everything and he's doing it through the work of the Church. Verse 6. Second Thessalonians Chapter 2 verse 6. "And you know what is restraining him."

Now, if you look back up we're talking about this one, "this man of lawlessness," the one who "opposes and exalts himself," verse 4, "over every so-called god and every object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God." And if you want to unpack this, you can look at the book of Daniel. You can look at the book of Revelation. It is this one human being person he's almost Satan incarnate. Satan is utilizing one world leader to dominate the planet. And so that's who he's going to be. He is going to claim to be God.

Verse 5, "Do you not remember I told you these things when I was still with you?" I told you all about them. "And you know what's restraining him now." You know why it hasn't completely happened, right? "So that he may be revealed in his time." It's not his time yet. We got the bus filled with Christians to be complete. It needs to be filled so we can get out of here. But for now, "The mystery of lawlessness is already at work." Of course it is. Look at the tribunal of the Jews in Chapter 18 of Acts. Look at the people being dragged into the theater in Acts 19. Yeah. Lawlessness is still at work, there are riots going on in Ephesus. There are riots going on in our streets. It's already at work.

"But only he who now restrains it." It's not all that it could be. It's not as bad as it could get. It's not overrunning everything. The Church is not snuffed out. "will do so until it is out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming." So Christ is going to come. Things are going to get really, really bad. But what's restraining it is a "what" in verse 6. But it's a "he" in verse 7. And so we know that it's just the third person of the Godhead working



through the institution of the Church to accomplish the work of holding back evil so that we can continue to do our work.

Now, here's the problem. You're all lamenting, and I get it. You're lamenting the fact that the walls are closing in on the Church. We have less freedoms to do what we're called to do, and that's one of the reasons we feel that so much as we basked in the wonderful opportunity we've had in a Judeo-Christian culture where we've been allowed to preach the gospel more freely than we are now, we feel the walls closing in and we get frustrated about that. And I get that. But the reality is you need to know with an optimistic, positive hope, God is not going to allow the Church to be snuffed out until its task is finished, and then he's going to bring them out of the way and then it's all going to collapse in on the culture. It's called the Great Tribulation. Daniel 12 says the worst time it's ever going to happen on the planet. Jesus said in Matthew 24, there's never been a worse time, more tribulation that's going to happen in this great tribulation period that is slated to come.

But the point is, you and I know we can continue our work even if we go underground, even if we lose our 501c3 status. Even if you can't write off your giving, even if we are an unlicensed church and we're criminals in our culture, we will continue to reach people with the gospel until the task is over. Read Second Peter Chapter 3 to learn all about the fact that God is not going to stop with his church until we're done evangelizing everyone God has called us to do.

So God is going to restrain evil just because the Church exists and the Church is going to be restraining evil through the person of the Spirit of God. Now, Asiarchs. Now, how good were the Asiarchs? Well, at least in this passage back in Acts Chapter 19 they had some good advice. And guess what? It seemed to parallel the disciples. And the disciples were giving good advice to Paul so that he didn't have his voice snuffed out. And the Asiarchs even, who are just a minority group of people who were in positions of power, but they were saying the right things. And if Paul followed it, which we see in the facts his life is spared, we recognize the value of that.

Now, I just want to use this one incidental, and I know it's a narrative text, this one incidental means of leaders, governmental leaders, pulling for the gospel in this case and the preacher of the gospel who they happen to like. The favor of the Christians, in this case, Paul, Aristarchus, Gaius was coming from at least a couple of these leaders. That was a good thing. And so that's what we want. We'd like that. And in reality that is what government was designed to do.

Number two, let's put it this way, or a Letter "B." We should be grateful for sin's restraint. Sin's restraint, albeit imperfectly, Letter "B" is "Via the Government." The government. Now don't roll your eyes or partially throw up in your mouth. I understand. I get the fact that our government is not what it used to be. And I understand that the freedoms that we might have enjoyed a hundred years ago are not the freedoms we enjoy now. And I realize that you know people in other parts of the world where like the government is awful, right? They've outlawed Christianity. I understand all of that. But I'm saying at least in the purposed structure of God for government, you can read about this in Romans Chapter 13 verses 1 through 10, read



how God has said that the government is there to restrain evil, evil that's going to allow the Church ultimately, as we see in the book of Romans, to accomplish, to crush Satan under its feet. But the reality is that that's what it's designed for.

Now, is it doing very well at that? It's not doing great at that. I get that. But it's not as though God has left himself without a testimony within government, even today's government. I was out in Orlando this weekend and I got to go to dinner, a big dinner, it wasn't a private table, with Josh Hawley our senator from Missouri talking about a vision that I can wholeheartedly get behind in terms of the freedom for the Church. And the week started with the governor of Florida on the platform talking about the important reality of Christianity, even though he doesn't share the same nuances of the gospel that I do. And I reject the fact that he doesn't understand some of the issues of salvation the way that I'd want him to.

But I recognize we still have, even within our collapsing culture, leaders, Asiarchs if you will, who are pulling for what I'm all about and what I trust you're all about and that's the proclamation of the gospel. And we pray, which we should. You should jot that down, by the way, First Timothy Chapter 2 verses 1 through 7. You ought to be praying for your leaders. And it doesn't mean that you're praying that Biden will have the greatest day he's ever had this afternoon. We don't pray, just like when Jesus said to pray for your enemies. I'm not praying that sinners will continue to sin. I'm not praying that people who are against Christianity or righteousness will continue to be. I want it all to stop, but I'm going to pray about it.

And here's another thing you ought to do. Ezekiel Chapter 9 says you ought to be groaning over the bad governmental society that we might live in. To the extent that it's bad, you ought to groan about the bad. Because if you don't groan about it, if you just got your head in the sand and you don't care, you're not being a godly person because it says in Ezekiel 9 that if you don't groan, then how can you even be righteous? You've got to groan. Matter of fact, I'll give you one passage on this. I think I wrote it down. Proverbs 29:2. Proverbs 29:2, "When the righteous increase, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan." That's exactly what's going on in Ezekiel 9. Right? If you're godly, you're going to groan when things are going bad.

But you ought to be praying, praying against bad governmental officials and you ought to be praying for the Asiarchs who might be pro-Church, at least allowing us the freedoms to do our job. And by the way, we can do more than just pray for them. Paul didn't know about this in his day. But in our day, you can still vote. And we hope that your vote is counted. But we'd like you to vote. And I would ask you to please recognize those opportunities as things that you ought to engage yourself with and involve yourself with. Because we have an opportunity to not only pray, but to try to at least make our voice be heard. And I'm just telling you that the answer is not in the government. Government is not our salvation. Government, though, can be something that helps restrains evil in society to allow us to do our job. Because our job is not government, our job is the gospel. And that needs to be distinguished in our thinking. But we praise God for the way that the Church restrains evil and also faintly and imperfectly the government as well.



I talk about stuff like this particularly, I always have people respond like, "I don't even like talking about this. I don't listen to the news anymore. It's just too depressing. And it scares me and it's awful." Um. Let me end with this passage. It will be worth looking at. Luke Chapter 12. Jesus has got a little line here that is so powerful for his disciples. And I don't want to close my eyes to what's in going on in our culture. This is a culture I live in. This is my mission field, Western American society, and obviously Orange County is my immediate mission field. I want to see people reached for Christ.

But I need to know what's going on. Not so that I can be afraid, right? But so I can be wise and discerning about the reality that it's not just stuff that's just out of control. It's not out of control. Matter of fact, the things that I'm doing in my evangelistic efforts with other people strike at the heart of the problem. I'm trying to see as Paul was told I'm pulling people out of the darkness of the enemy's domain into the light of the gospel. That was said to him early on in the book of Acts. And it's what he echoes in Colossians Chapter 1. We want to bring people out of darkness into the light.

And so every evangelistic encounter we have, that's the goal. Even in your own sanctification in moving into increasing purity in your walk with God that we're fighting the enemy's work, the temptation of the enemy. And all of that is great. I want us to see that so we can put it in context, but I don't want it to make us afraid. Matter of fact, the whole goal, and it may not seem like I'm accomplishing the goal, is not to discourage you this morning. It's to encourage you with words like this, because this is the truth of it all. Ready? Look at this verse in Luke 12 verse 32. Jesus says, "Fear not, little flock." Now, little flock makes me feel like, oh, it's just, you know, I wish we were the big flock. But you're not. You're the little flock. If you're always going to be on a narrow road and going through a "small gate that leads to life and few are those who enter by it." So you're the little flock.

"Fear not," though. Why? Because I want you to think about the current reality of your Father's disposition toward you. "It is your Father's good pleasure," I love that, "to give you the kingdom." And one day is coming and he's going to say, "Enter into the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Enter in. He's going to open the door for you to go, if you're a Christian, right? And he says, listen, you are going to be "sheep among wolves" and you're going to be dragged into officials and have to answer for things. And you may lose your job, you may lose your friends, you may lose your reputation in the world. But fear not, little flock, I know you're the minority. And it feels like in our day that we're increasingly a minority. I get it. Fear not, little flock.

Remember this, the disposition of your Father. It is the Father's good pleasure. He is pleased to endow you with this thing. And this thing is when "the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of our Lord God and of his Christ Jesus." And he will reign forever and ever. I just need us to be, like, realistically optimistic about the fact that we're going to finish our task. And I trust that many in this room are going to hear from him, "Well done. Good and faithful servant. Enter into your rest." Right? "Take charge of five cities." We're going to have a kingdom that is going to be ruled by Christ as it's put in Second Peter Chapter 3. We look



forward to a world where righteousness dwells a "new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells." I hope you can do that optimistically this week.

Let's pray. God, help us, please, in a world with much to discourage us and make us groan to realize that that groaning even is an expression of our alliance with your truth. That no one can be for righteousness and rejoice at wickedness. We just can't. But we're not going to be dissuaded. We're not going to be put down. We're not even going to be afraid, because we were told, Jesus, we were told that by you, that we were not to fear, even though we're a little flock. But we know that the Father is on our side. The Father has granted us access to the kingdom that one day we will physically enter into. And so, God, we look forward to that. Make that a palpable expectation for us, and one that fuels us on to continue, not only to be discerning about the culture we live in, the times we live in, but to be just enthusiastic about pushing back the gates of hell, at least in our evangelism at a heart at a time, a voice at a time, a knee at a time that bows to Christ. Get us excited about that this week.

In Jesus name. Amen