

YOU CAN BE SMART BUT FOOLISH!

Today's Text: Acts 19: 21- 41

Extracts:

And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way, for a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: "Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade...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. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised ... whom all Asia and the world worship." Now when they heard this, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" [Acts 19: 23-28].

George Tiller, a 67-year-old medical doctor, was an usher at the Reformation Lutheran Church in Wichita, Kansas, USA.¹ His wife, Jeanne, was in the choir. They had 4 children and 10 grandchildren. On Sunday, May 31, 2009, during the morning service, a 51 year-old gun man walked into the church foyer and shot Dr. Tiller at close range. He died instantly. Tiller was one of the few providers of late-term abortion in America. For decades, he had been the target of anti-abortion groups who saw him as a killer. Despite frequent threats and violence, he continued what he considered "high quality healthcare" for women.

Dr. Tiller was certainly smart, evading death for decades and making good money from his practice. But was he wise? He was killed in the house of worship but not as a martyr for Christ. How about you? Have you ever sat down to evaluate what you are doing in your house or school or church or business or work? You are using privileges and opportunities to get material wealth or promote your interests but have you ever thought whether you are glorifying God in the process? Is it not possible that you are smart but foolish? In this week's Bible story, a silversmith that was more interested in protecting his trade than anything else instigated gullible people to attack Paul and his fellow missionaries under the guise of religion. How far could his smart move take him? Let us find out from this week's exciting study.

¹ Based on the following sources: "Suspect held in slaying of Kan. Abortion doctor," The Associated Press; Sun., May 31, 2009; : <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/31029377/> ; and "George Tiller," From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Tiller

1. Background: Was Demetrius about business or worship?

In Chemistry, a catalyst is defined as a substance that causes or accelerates a chemical reaction without itself being affected. There is a social equivalent called *the social catalyst*. It is a person or thing *that causes activity between two or more persons or forces without himself (or herself) or itself being affected.*² Look at the popular issues that dominate the media in your country. What issues are you focusing on right now in your family or office or place of worship? Has it ever occurred to you that there are some people in all such places whose “job” it is to create such diversions for their own selfish ends? You may not be able to trace their voices or fingers but they are the most active from a safe disguise. They see themselves as the clever ones who have all the answers to the problems being discussed and yet they are the ones causing them! They may be clever or smart but are they wise? Is it not possible that they may look smart but they are actually foolish? How can we spot such people and how can we avoid being part of them? Those are the questions that we shall attempt to answer in this week’s study.

The Bible verses for our study come from the experience of Paul and his men during his missionary visit to Ephesus. In last week’s study, we saw how magicians burnt their books of enormous value and gave their lives to Christ. After that great feat, Paul sent ahead two of his assistants, Timothy and Erastus, while he remained in Asia Minor for a time [Acts 19: 19-22]. That was when our story for this week’s study broke. A great commotion broke out at Ephesus about the Way (of Christ), led by a silversmith called Demetrius. We can examine the developing story as follows:

a) *Business was Demetrius’ main concern*

Demetrius was a businessman “who made silver shrines of Diana [a Greek goddess] [that] brought no small profit to the craftsmen” [vv. 23-24]. He called together the “*workers of similar occupation*” and said to them, “Men, you know that *we have our prosperity by this trade*...[and] 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*” [vv. 25-26].

Examine my emphases in the above paragraph. Demetrius did not go to the general public. He went to the guild of silversmiths like himself. When there is a crisis in our organisation or place of worship or even country that threatens our permanent interests, to where do we run? We appeal to base sentiments, such as race or ethnicity or gender or religion. We look for the enemies of our enemies. We look for political allies or professional colleagues or trade union solidarity. Some people even run to well-placed members of their cults!

² <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/catalyst>

b) *But he diverted the people's attention elsewhere!*

Demetrius was not interested in the truth of Paul's gospel but in its threat to his lucrative business as a silversmith. For him to win, however, he needed to go beyond his guild. He needed allies to join him to form a broad coalition of shared interests against the new religion! So, he told his listeners, "Not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also ***the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship***" [v. 27]. Paul's message was now made not only a threat to silversmiths but to the official religion of the then known world!

That worked his listeners into a crowd, driven by emotional contagion. They shouted, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" They seized Gaius and Aristarchus, fellow Macedonians who happened to be Paul's travel companions. There was so much confusion that "some... cried one thing and some another, for ***the assembly was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together***" [29:32]!

Does that sound familiar to you? How many of the people who joined in stoning Stephen to death knew what it was all about [Acts 7:57, 59]? How many Muslim sympathisers in the northern part of Nigeria care to find out if *Boko Haram* is actually interested in propagating their religion or its political agenda? Crowds hardly have time or need to evaluate issues objectively!

c) *But the city clerk brought him to reality!*

The unusual noise drew the attention of the city clerk. What he heard was "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" To him, that was no big deal because everyone already knew that Ephesus was the temple guardian of Diana whose image, they believed, fell down from heaven. Since there was no dispute among them on that "truth," there was no basis for the "disorderly assembly." So, he went on to address the fundamental issue that Demetrius and his fellow silversmiths tried to hide, namely, the threat to their business interests. If they had any case against anyone, the city clerk charged them to take the matter to court and bring lawful charges against the offending party. The matter should follow due process, otherwise, they were all in danger of being called to question for that day's uproar, especially as there was no plausible reason to give to justify the disorderly gathering. After that, he dismissed the assembly [Acts 19: 33-41].

From the foregoing, we can conclude that Demetrius was smart but foolish. He had legitimate fears concerning his business interests. He could have found innovative ways to reach a new market niche, such as making silverware for

Christian converts. However, to do that would mean a fundamental change in his mind set. After all, did he not hear that the magicians in that country had burnt their books? So, what are you going to do when your smartness cannot give you what you want?

2. People's 'smart' moves on crucial issues at stake

In a way, we are all social catalysts or victims of their manipulations. When you cannot be manipulated, you are a social catalyst yourself. So, where do you currently stand on crucial issues around you at home, office, church or business?

Here are some possibilities:

a) *You may be sitting on the fence!*

Some people prefer to do nothing or get involved for different reasons. For example, they may be afraid to lose benefits or privileges. So, they would rather sit on the fence than have any opinion one way or the other on burning issues. From such people, you will hear expressions like, "Let sleeping dogs lie!" or "Let bygones be bygones!" or "Let's move on!" The matter is not resolved because social catalysts can always recruit new supporters by changing their tactics. If skin colour or ethnic/racial differences do not work, why not try blackmail or religion?

In the epic spiritual battle between the prophet Elijah and King Ahab that lasted for three and half years, the king, at the prophet's instigation, brought all the children of Israel and his 850 prophets [450 of Baal and 400 of Asherah] to Mount Carmel to determine who was worshipping the true God. Elijah came to all the people and said, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." You know what happened? We are told, "But the people answered him not a word" [1 Kgs 18: 17-21]. They were sitting on the fence.

The word of God says, "To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin" [Jam. 4: 17]. You cannot afford to sit on the fence and pretend that you are innocent. You are either hot or cold because if you are lukewarm, the Lord will spew you out of His mouth [Rev. 3: 15-16]. So, get smart and wise. ***Know what is at stake and take a stand for the truth.***

b) *Or part of the gullible crowd!*

The crowd that Demetrius stirred up "was confused, and most of them did not know why they had come together" [Acts 19: 32]. Indeed, most people in any gullible crowd may never know what is happening. For example, when Judas Iscariot led the Jewish leaders to arrest Jesus, he came with "a

great multitude with swords and clubs” [Matt. 26: 47], but at His trial before Caiaphas the high priest, when the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, they found none [v. 59]! So, why did “a great multitude” come with swords in the first place?

You are part of the gullible crowd when you take a stand on a matter before you have the facts; when you spread false reports because they hurt the people you regard as your opponents or enemies; when you take bribes to support error; when you condone an error out of fear for your life or status. For example, Aaron should know better, being Moses’ mouthpiece before the children of Israel in the wilderness. Yet, soon after Moses had gone into the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments and the people wanted another god to serve, it was Aaron who made the golden calf for them. In fact, Aaron was the one who proclaimed to the people, “Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD” [Ex. 32: 1-6]. Fear made him part of the gullible crowd. He was smart to save his neck but foolish to serve an idol.

The word of God says, “You shall not circulate a false report.... You shall not follow a crowd to do evil” [Ex. 23: 1, 2]. Why should you walk in the counsel of the ungodly or stand in the path of sinners or sit in the seat of the scornful? Whoever does such things cannot prosper [Ps. 1: 1-3]. Instead, go gladly with those who say to you, “Let us go into the house of the LORD” [Ps. 122: 1]. To do so is to be smart and wise.

c) *Or actually one of the manipulators!*

Some people are like Demetrius who are adept at manipulating others to do their bidding. You will see their signature in the misconduct of those that they have misguided but you may never see their hand. ***They have no permanent friends but only their permanent interests. They will steal, kill or destroy but only for themselves!***

The scribes and Pharisees are good examples of manipulators during the days of Jesus on earth. On one occasion, Jesus used seven “woes to you” to describe a profile of the Pharisees [Matt. 23: 13-29], as follows:

- They shut up the kingdom of heaven against others and they themselves could not make it;
- They made long prayers for widows but devoured their houses;
- They won one proselyte and made twice that number the sons of hell;
- They were blind guides, leading others astray;
- They paid more attention to rituals than justice, mercy and faith;
- They measured righteousness from the outside, not from the heart;

- They were whitewashed tombs, beautiful outside but with dry bones inside; and
- They were incurable hypocrites

From the foregoing, it is clear that those who think that they are smart to manipulate others for their own gains are living on borrowed time. Sooner than later, truth finders or truth upholders will stand up and say, “The buck stops here!” The city clerk at Ephesus stopped Demetrius from doing more damage to the truth. How about you?

3. Conclusion: It is only Jesus that won’t mislead you!

As Jesus headed for Jerusalem on His way to death on the cross, He walked ahead of His disciples “and they were amazed [and] as they followed, they were afraid” [Mk 10: 32]. He spoke the truth to them and led by example because, even though He was their Master, He lived among them as the one who served [Matt. 20: 28]. That is why we should look up to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith [Heb. 12; 2]. He never manipulated anyone (by force or trick) to follow Him. He never wrote any manual on motivation. Yet, He commands the largest body of followers today. It is, therefore, not surprising that He will one day return to judge the world.

So, do not allow anybody, whether in the form of a parent or mentor, priest or pastor, boss or patron, to manipulate you to do his/her dirty work that does not glorify God. The soul that sins shall die [Ezek. 18: 4]. If you allow a coconut to be cracked on your head, you will not eat out of it!

It is only Jesus that will NEVER mislead you. If you follow Him truthfully, you will be as wise as a serpent and as innocent as a dove [Matt. 10: 15].

Get smart- but don’t be foolish!