

I hate the Apostle Paul. I hate Paul, Apollos, Timothy, Priscilla, and all the other followers of Jesus. Equally. If you are a follower of Jesus, I hate you, too. You've destroyed my job, my family, and my city.

Your world is upside down, and it has been that way for so long that you probably have no ability to see the world in any way other than how you see it. However, I will explain my reality to you, and you will understand Christianity in a new way. And...you will understand why I hate the Apostle Paul.

Thousands of years ago in a faraway cave in a deep forest. A hunter leaves his cave to hunt for a small deer. Desperate for food, desperate to feed his starving family. On the way out of the cave, he stumbles and reaches for a rock to steady himself. That day, in a short period of time, he finds a deer, kills it with ease. That night, he feeds his family, he stares at the rock, remembers how he touched it before his unusually successful hunt.

A few days later, that hunter goes out to hunt and furtively touches the rock on the way out of his cave. Wants to keep it on the down low. Once again, he has unusually quick success in his hunt. Suspicion confirmed! If he touches the rock before hunting, he is more likely to prosper. That night, tells his wife, convinces her to touch the rock so that she will become pregnant sooner. She touches the rock and becomes pregnant soon thereafter.

Now, there is no doubt. Touching the rock improves your chance of being prosperous. Future generations of the family touch the rock whenever they want to be prosperous, and even begin sacrificing to the rock to be more prosperous. As this family becomes prosperous, other families in their tribe find their own rocks or trees to sacrifice to, to worship. Idol worship appears to cause prosperity, in some cases. People would obviously be foolish not to have their own family idols to worship. There was seemingly only an upside with no downside when worshipping a family idol.

An example of family idols is found in the Bible as it tells the story of the beginning of the Jewish people.¹ Abraham's son, Isaac, had two wives who were sisters, Rachel and Leah. Isaac takes his wives and runs away from their father. In the escape, Rachel steals her father's household gods without telling Isaac. These gods were probably small carvings in wood or stone.

¹ Genesis 31:22-35

The father chases them down, complains about Isaac running away, but he also accuses Isaac of stealing his gods. The charge of stealing the gods is so serious that Isaac says that if anyone is found with the gods, that person shall die. Even though Isaac knew the true God, he still understood the importance of household gods.

Over the course of time, people chose to worship every kind of inanimate object, ancestor, animal, or part of nature. People have always been desperate to be protected and prosperous, and willing to do anything to help make that happen.

As you can imagine, it was only a small step for gods to become important to cities or countries. In addition to families having their own gods, cities and countries began to have their own gods, too. Obviously, you want your own country to have the most powerful gods so your country will prevail over other countries. If your country ever gets beaten in battle, you just change to the winning gods.

The Bible has an example of such national gods in the story of the Philistines beating the Israelites and taking the Ark of the Covenant from them.² At first, the Philistines were afraid of the Ark of the Covenant because it held a powerful god, but then they rejoiced when they captured the Ark and took control of the powerful god inside. This was a sign that the Philistine gods were more powerful than the God of the Jews. They misunderstood which was more powerful, and after a sufficient amount of suffering, they sent the Ark back to the Jews.

Hundreds of years after that, on Mount Carmel, the prophet Elijah pitted the God of the Israelites against the foreign gods of Queen Jezebel and King Ahab. When the God of the Israelites won the contest, the people of Israel killed the prophets of the foreign gods. They had no use for loser gods.

Much of the Old Testament has to do with the worship of idols versus the worship of God. The first of the Ten Commandments is: "You shall have no other gods before me."³ That commandment set the stage for the overall theme of the Old Testament: God commanded the Israelites to worship only him, and the Israelites refused to do so consistently.

The Old Testament stories ended about four hundred years before my time. In that four hundred years, the Roman Empire came into being and controlled the whole Western world. Here is what was obvious to the whole world - the Romans were the most prosperous people! Therefore, their gods must be the most powerful gods.

Excluding the tiny people group known as the Jews, most people in the Roman Empire during my time lived with a similar religious pattern. Each family had its own gods, often in the form of ancestor worship. Each tribe or city had its own gods. Each country had its own gods.

² 1 Samuel 4, 5

³ Exodus 20:3

The purpose of gods was to provide protection and prosperity. Sometimes you had to borrow gods or switch gods to improve your own prosperity. This was not a matter of theology or philosophy, but a very practical matter that affected everyone in your community. Blasphemy was a practical matter, not a matter of going to heaven or hell. By disrespecting a god, you were endangering the prosperity of a family, city or country.

Which brings me to why I hate the Apostle Paul. My name is Demetrius and I am a silversmith, and I lived in the city of Ephesus in the year 56 AD.

Ephesus was located in modern day Turkey. It was one of the biggest and most prosperous cities in the Roman Empire.

One reason Ephesus was prosperous was that it had the giant temple of Artemis.⁴ In this temple was the misshapen meteorite that the Ephesians worshiped.⁵ It is important that you understand our logic. Ephesus was prosperous. Ephesus worshiped Artemis. Therefore, Artemis must be a powerful god. Since Artemis is a powerful god, anybody who worships Artemis will be prosperous.

Since people wanted to worship Artemis, the city built an entire economy based on selling little silver copies of the meteorite, having temple prostitutes, and selling sacrifices to Artemis. Since the demand for these services and products was high, the city prospered, and silversmiths like myself also prospered. Obviously, Artemis was a great and powerful god because we prospered.

Since the whole world had a similar thought process, we could compete economically against other cities under the protection of the Roman Empire. in such an orderly, controlled way of life, what could possibly go wrong? The Apostle Paul is what. The Apostle Paul turned the world upside down.⁶

The Apostle Paul offered a new way of thinking, the most dangerous thing in the world. Instead of offering prosperity in this life, Paul offered a personal relationship with the creator of the entire universe. He offered eternal salvation. He offered one, all-powerful universal God, instead of homemade idols of wood or stone or metal. Or silver.

We Ephesians could compete against the gods of other cities, but how could we compete against a God we could not see or touch. Or make silver copies of. Prosperity in this world could not compete with eternal life. Temple prostitutes could not compete with a personal relationship with God.

⁴ Or Diana as named in the King James Version

⁵ Acts 19:35

⁶ Acts 17:6

Within three years after coming to Ephesus, Paul's teaching had permeated Ephesus and the entire province of Asia. The number of pilgrims coming to worship Artemis plummeted. My sales plummeted. I got together with the other idol makers of town and told them what Paul had done, how he had turned our world upside down. He was telling people that gods made by human hands were no gods at all. I told my fellow silversmiths that if this were true, our jobs and our city and our gods would become worthless. And that threatened the well-being of my family. We had had enough of Paul and his dangerous thought processes. We started a riot.⁷

It quickly spread to the rest of the city. We grabbed Paul and his companions and headed to our giant city theater. It was complete chaos. We shouted "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians" for two whole hours! Done!

Finally, one of the city officials took over. He urged my fellow citizens to calm down or we would be charged by the Romans with disturbing the peace. This was a very serious charge, and we knew it. He told us that Paul and his group had broken no laws and that the silversmiths should take up our case in court. He dismissed the huge crowd and made them disperse peacefully. Our city and our way of life was mortally wounded at that moment.

When you read Paul's letters, you probably think of all kinds of theological niceties and religious intricacies. Things like: church unity, being saved by grace through faith, spiritual warfare, the role of the Holy Spirit. When you hear about the spread of the Gospel, you think that we Greeks and Romans were thrilled to be receiving the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Definitely not me, and definitely not what most Romans and Greeks first thought of, as is obvious by the fact that Christianity actually spread very slowly over the next five plus years. What you think of as Good News, most of us thought of as Bad News. Very Bad News.

We were trying to understand how our cultures and families would change if they followed the things Paul taught. What would happen if gods were no longer made by us, by our hands? if those gods had no role in making us more prosperous, how would we teach our children about our city's gods? The biggest income sources for much of our economy would go away. Our political systems would be undermined.

Me? I was trying to figure out how to feed my children since fewer and fewer people wanted to buy the expertly fabricated silver copies of Artemis. Handcrafted, with love, by yours truly.

The Apostle Paul killed our way of life. He killed my job. He killed my family's future. And he did it in a way that I could not fight. His teachings destroyed everything I held dear. Now you surely understand why I hate the Apostle Paul.

⁷ Acts 19:19