

The Mayor Sways the “Reckless” with the Law: Courts & Proconsuls, & Fear of the Roman Army; Paul’s Innocent Teachings at Tyrannus Hall; Acts 19:38-41

Acts 19:38 - “So if [εἰ, ei: first class condition: assumption of truth for the sake of argument] Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him, have a complaint against any man, the courts are in session and proconsuls are available; let them bring charges against one another there.”

1. The mayor now begins to remind Demetrius and his followers of Roman law in the light of their current behavior. They have absolutely no legal claim to support their uprising.
2. To drive his point home the mayor opens his remarks with a first class condition that assumes the statement is true for the sake of argument but which in fact is not true.
3. The men sought by the mob have not stolen money from the temple treasury, nor have they blasphemed Artemis. Therefore, if it should be true that Demetrius and the craftsmen have a legitimate complaint against these men then ...
4. What follows next is the apodosis: “... the courts are in session and the proconsuls are available.”
5. “Courts” is the plural subject ἀγοραῖος, *agoraios*: many Gentile cities had large marketplaces called the *agora*. Its use may be compared to a town square where people meet for trade, discuss issues of the day, and carry on casual meetings.
6. The agora was also the place where trials were held in order to resolve disputes. In the agora was a rostrum referred to in Acts 18:12 as τὸ βῆμα, *to bēma*, a raised platform in the agora in front of the residence of the proconsul and referred to in verse 12 as “the judgment seat.” When a case was brought before the tribunal it was referred to as *agoraios*, or “court.”
7. The person who had jurisdiction over this court was the proconsul. The mayor uses the plural form of ἀνθύπατος, *anthupatos*.

8. A proconsul was the governor of a Roman province, chosen by lot by the Roman senate from among the former consuls who had been out of office for at least five years. He seldom served for more than a year. The province in which Ephesus was located was called Asia which included a large part of western Asia Minor. Its original capital was Pergamos but under Augustus the seat of government was transferred to Ephesus. Local leaders throughout the province were “chief officers” who met annually in different cities as the provincial council. On this occasion they met in Ephesus during the annual Artemisium festival. These men were called Asiarchs.¹
9. The mayor spoke in general terms by using the plurals of court and proconsul. This stressed the legal system, not those who served in the system.
10. In other words, the mayor is scolding Demetrius and the craftsmen: “Rome has established courts in our province and her senate has appointed proconsuls. The courts are in session and proconsuls are available. So why are you taking the law into your own hands?”
11. Then he concludes the verse by asserting, “If you have charges to bring against these men then bring them before the court!”
12. This statement is made up of two words in the Greek, the present active imperative of the verb **ἐγκαλέω, enkaleō**: Let them bring charges,” and the dative plural of the pronoun **ἀλλήλων, allēlōn**: “against each other.”
13. This verse emphasizes how one should pursue justice regarding violations of the law. If there are other considerations that cannot be dealt with by the court then take it to the city council:

Acts 19:39 - “But if you want anything beyond this, it shall be settled in a lawful assembly.”

1. If Demetrius has any issues that cannot be addressed by the court then he should take them up at a local assembly where the matter can be addressed through agreed upon regulations.
2. This local assembly met three times a month so Demetrius was free to bring his grievances before the council at its next meeting.
3. The mayor has brought the crowd back to reality by reminding them of the laws of divine establishment. Demetrius and the members of the mob really have no respect for the law but they do have a fear of it.
4. They knew that Rome would not tolerate such an uprising and especially one that led to a lynching.

¹ E. J. Banks. “Asia,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, James Orr, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 1:272.

5. Should this event come to Rome's attention the city of Ephesus could lose its status as a free city and fall under the control of the Roman army.
6. This possible consequence is exactly what the mayor means with his final comment:

Acts 19:40 - "For indeed we are in danger of being accused of a riot in connection with today's events, since there is no real cause for it, and in this connection we will be unable to account for this disorderly gathering."

1. The mayor knows that his job is on the line if he is unable to defuse this uprising. For over two years Paul had been unable to put the fear of God into these men but in one short speech covering six verses, the mayor is able to put the fear of Rome into them.
2. PRINCIPLE: Without doctrine in the soul the unbeliever is a loose cannon and cannot be brought under control until he is made to fear something greater than himself.
3. All unbelievers are self-serving. Their lust patterns take them toward areas of personal aggrandizement at the expense of all other considerations.
4. The only thing that can bring an unbeliever's soul into compliance with principles of order is fear and that fear must have the backing of superior force.
5. Rome provided the force that instilled the fear and was not shy about using it. If Demetrius and his buddies wanted to continue to make any money at all they had best not give Rome cause to send in troops.
6. To this point Rome did not prohibit the teaching of Christian doctrine so Paul was well within his rights to do so. He spoke daily at the lecture hall of Tyrannus \tī-ran'-us\ for two years as well as the home of Prisca and Aquilla.
7. If Roman law allowed Christian teaching and it resulted in the veneration of Artemis being negatively affected then no law presently prevented it. Therefore, there was no justification for the riot.
8. Having successfully restored order, the mayor disbursed the crowd:

Acts 39:41 - After he had said this, the mayor dismissed the assembly.

1. From the standpoint of the Ephesians, the mollifying factor was the mayor's application of the laws of divine establishment.

2. But the laws of divine establishment, whether the unbeliever is aware of them or not, are of divine origin and thus are immutable principles that are designed to maintain order within the environment created by fallen humanity.
3. The laws of divine establishment are therefore a means by which Jesus Christ controls history: from Paul's teachings, to his illness, to the riot in Ephesus, to the mayor's address, to the fall of the temple of Artemis, all were a result of the doctrine that Jesus Christ controls history, a subject that demands a review in light of Acts 19.