

Acts 19:23-41

Identity Crisis

Learning Objectives

- Ponder the effects of crowd-think and why we oftentimes submit to group norms in place of our own personal convictions
- Examine the source of the Ephesians' identity and how we can learn from their example today
- Consider the feedback loop of an identity crisis, and look at how the gospel provides us with a permanent solution

Pray for your time together as a group.

? Icebreaker: Watch this clip from How I Met Your Mother to see a comical perspective on crowd mentality and then ask the following questions: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbah7GnfpXM>

- What tempts you to join in on crowd-think?
- Why do you think it's so easy to get swept up in mob mentality?

Read Out Loud: Acts 19:23-29 (NIV)

23 About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way. 24 A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there. 25 He called them together, along with the workers in related trades, and said: "You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. 26 And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia. He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. 27 There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited; and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty."

28 When they heard this, they were furious and began shouting: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" 29 Soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theater together.

Why Are Christians Called The Way?

"An important variance emerges when one considers that Luke explicitly uses the term way in Acts (9:2; 16:17; 18:25, 26; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22) as an identity marker that points to the early Christians. The early Christians are to live out, in the context of Lukan theology, the teachings and experience of Jesus as outlined and identified along His way in Luke 9:51–19:27. In this way, Luke ingeniously follows Mark; for where Mark identifies the twelve disciples as traveling the way, Luke has the early Christians in Acts journey on the way as well."

Source: Kayle de Waal in Ministry Magazine: "The Motif of Way in Luke and Acts."

? Why does Demetrius voice concern to his fellow Ephesians about Paul's preaching?

Possible Answer: Demetrius is concerned about his reputation and that of his fellow craftsmen, the local economy, and Artemis' glory. He may have acted selfishly, as a member of a working class whose livelihood depended on Artemis' popularity, or he may have had a legitimate fear for his fellow workers and the god that he served.

Who was Artemis?

According to Greek mythology, Artemis was the goddess of chastity, the hunt, the moon, and the natural environment. Aside from her birthplace (the island of Delos), Ephesus was the best-known place of Artemis' worship. The Temple of Artemis (Artemision) at Ephesus was the first to be constructed entirely of marble and was one of the largest Greek temples ever built, measuring some 377 feet in length and 180 feet wide before it was destroyed in 356 BC (larger by twenty feet on a side than a football field). The temple is known best as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Sources: greekmythology.com,
penelope.uchicago.edu

? Demetrius mocks Paul's claim that "gods made by human hands are no gods at all." How might Demetrius' response in verse 27 actually reinforce Paul's statement instead of refuting it?

Possible Answer: Demetrius' says that Artemis' temple will be "discredited," and that the goddess will lose her "divine majesty," simply because people are being told that man-made gods are not real. His words inadvertently uphold what Paul is saying. A real god's glory would not be contingent on the state of an earthly temple, nor could it be robbed by human hands or proclamations.

? In verse 28, as a result of Demetrius warning, the riotous crowd begins chanting, "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" How might this dispute of Artemis' divinity have challenged the Ephesian's identity, causing them to react in this way?

Possible Answer: The collective worth of the Ephesians

is tied to that of Artemis, and for that reason, they are upset and fight back when her reputation is at stake. This chant serves to reaffirm Artemis' power and worth to a crowd who fears that she may be devalued amongst the public by Paul and his companions.

? Why doesn't God ask us – or need us – to defend his honor in the way that the Ephesians defend Artemis in this passage?

Possible Answer: God is inherently good and worthy of worship. His character is not dependent on the worship of humans. God delights in our worship, but his honor is unchanging and eternal whether sing his praises or shout to the contrary.

Optional Transition: In the first half of the passage, we saw Demetrius summon a response from a crowd in response to teachings that threatened Artemis' honor and the livelihood of the Ephesians at large. In the second half of the passage, we'll examine the deeper motivations behind this outrage at Paul's teachings.

Read Out Loud: Acts 19:30-41 (NIV)

30 Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. 31 Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater. 32 The assembly was in confusion: Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people did not even know why they were there. 33 The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front, and they shouted instructions to him. He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. 34 But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours: "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!"

35 The city clerk quieted the crowd and said: "Fellow Ephesians, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis and of her image, which fell from heaven? 36 Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash. 37 You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess. 38 If, then, Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. 39 If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly. 40 As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of what happened today. In that case we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it." 41 After he had said this, he dismissed the assembly.

? Paul is not only held back from entering the theater by his disciples, but he is also begged by his prominent Ephesian friends not to enter. What were they afraid of?

Possible Answer: Given that the crowd was in an uproar because of Paul's negative statements about Artemis, they would have had little patience in acting harshly towards him if they were to figure out who he was. Understanding this context, those close to Paul would not have wanted him to expose himself and face the wrath of an angry and unstable crowd.

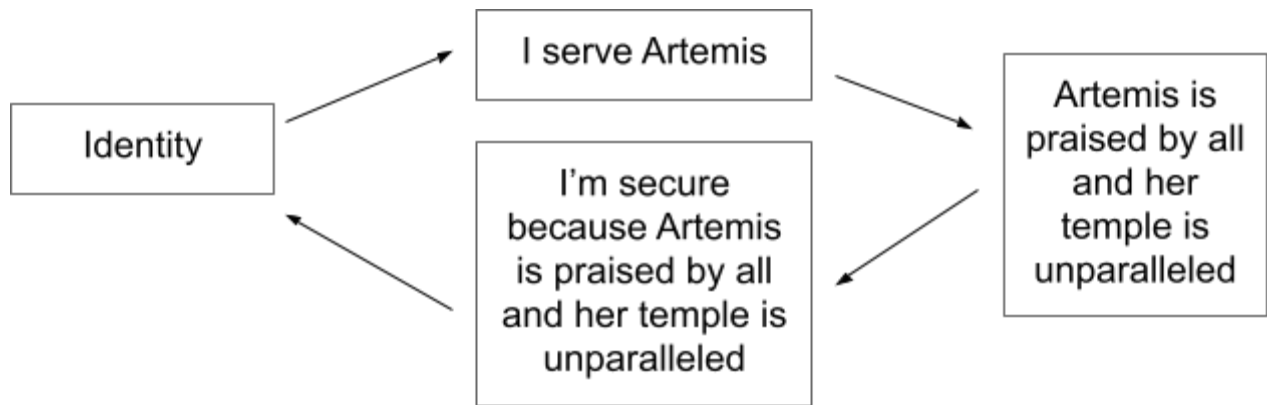
Crowd Pleaser

Alexander likely hoped to join the Ephesian's opposition to the Christians. If given the chance to speak, he probably would have distanced the Jews from Christianity and further condemned Paul and his followers. However, the crowd saw that he was a Jew (and no more a worshiper of Artemis than the Christians were), and had no interest in giving him this opportunity.

Source: Zondervan NASB Study Bible, page 1613.

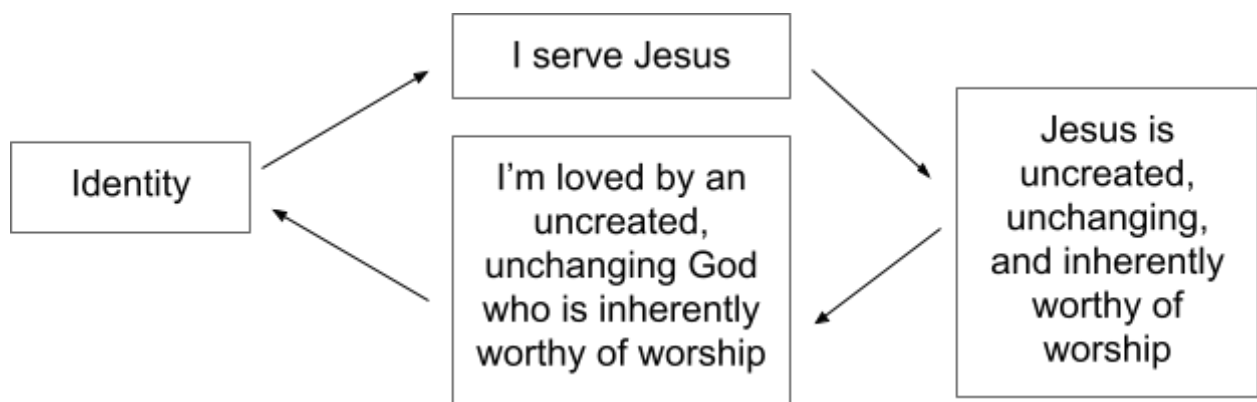
? In verses 35-41, the proconsul settles the crowd by affirming the irrefutable deity and widespread praise of Artemis, effectively ending the identity crisis that the crowd was experiencing. Looking at the flowcharts below, can you think of any events or occurrences that could render his argument ineffective in consoling the people?

Possible Answer: Since Artemis is a created god, her deity is dependent on her continued popularity amongst human beings. If Artemis' reputation or widespread worship were to diminish for any reason, her value, and that of the Ephesians, would be undermined. If Artemis is no longer an esteemed goddess, the Ephesians no longer have a basis for security.



? How does a belief in Jesus Christ offer us the best solution to our ongoing struggles with identity?

Possible Answer: Jesus is uncreated and unchanging. His glory is not contingent on our abilities or our worship of him. He is inherently worthy of praise whether humans acknowledge him or not. He loves us whether we perform well or poorly, whether we faithful or faithless. This means that our identity is tied to something that will eternally satisfy.



For Discussion and Accountability

? What idols do you look to for security and identity instead of Jesus? Do you have any reason to believe that these idols will ultimately satisfy our desires?

? How can we encourage each other to turn to Jesus, an uncreated and unchanging God, as our ultimate source of our identity rather than our present circumstances and possessions?