

Acts 19:37

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.

Analysis

For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess—The town clerk's defense of Paul and his companions highlights their ministry strategy: they preached Christ positively without desecrating pagan temples (ἱεροσύλους, hierosulous, 'temple robbers') or directly blaspheming Artemis (βλασφημοῦντας, blasphēmountas). This doesn't mean they compromised—Acts 19:26 records Paul's message that 'they be no gods, which are made with hands'—but they didn't engage in provocative iconoclasm.

The phrase **robbers of churches** literally means 'temple robbers,' referring to those who stole from pagan shrines—a serious crime in Roman law. **Blasphemers of your goddess** would have included direct mockery or desecration. Paul's approach was to proclaim the truth of the living God and let the Holy Spirit convict, rather than attacking paganism frontally. This created legal protection: Roman law allowed new religions unless they disturbed the peace or committed sacrilege.

Historical Context

Roman religious policy was generally tolerant of diverse beliefs (polytheism was the norm) but fiercely protected established cults from disruption. Temple robbery and blasphemy were punishable offenses. The town clerk's testimony that Paul had done neither was crucial—it established Christianity as a lawful teaching rather

than a public menace. This legal precedent would be cited in later trials. Ephesus had particularly strict laws protecting the Artemis cult, given its economic and civic importance.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How can Christians maintain bold gospel proclamation while avoiding unnecessary offense or cultural provocation?
2. What's the difference between compromising biblical truth and being 'wise as serpents and harmless as doves' in hostile contexts?
3. In what situations might direct confrontation of false religion be necessary, and when might positive gospel proclamation be more strategic?

Interlinear Text

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|------------------------|---------|---------------|--------|---------|---------|
| ἡγάγετε | γὰρ | τοὺς | ἄνδρας | τούτους | οὔτε |
| ye have brought hither | For | G3588 | men | these | nor yet |
| G71 | G1063 | | G435 | G5128 | G3777 |
| ἱεροσύλους | οὔτε | βλασφημοῦντας | τὴν | θεὰν | ὑμῶν |
| robbers of churches | nor yet | blasphemers | G3588 | goddess | of your |
| G2417 | G3777 | G987 | | G2299 | G5216 |

Additional Cross-References

Romans 2:22 (Parallel theme): Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?

