



Pastors' CORNER

Dear Friends in Christ,

In Acts 17 we read that while Paul was waiting in Athens, "he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols." A contemporary translation might read that Paul was "triggered" to see that the city was full of idols. Before becoming the apostle of Christ to the Gentiles, Paul had been a Pharisee. And if there was one thing that Pharisees hated, it was the worship of idols. As a Pharisee, Paul would have been so triggered by those idols that he would have screamed at the people of Athens and called them idiots for worshiping blocks of stone or metal. He would have mocked them just like some of the Old Testament prophets did.

But instead, Paul approached those idolatrous pagan gentiles with humility and gentleness. He said, "People of Athens, I see that in every way you are very religious." He recognized that without the truth of God, those ancient pagans were lost in their search for meaning in life. Paul didn't not condemn them for being lost. He had sympathy for them.

Maybe it was because Paul remembered how lost he was before Jesus graciously confronted him on the road to Damascus. Paul was so lost that he thought God wanted him to arrest and beat up and even kill followers of Jesus. But then a lightning bolt from heaven knocked him down and he heard the voice of Jesus calling him into a whole new life. Paul knew that he could have been just as idolatrous as those Gentiles except for the grace of God.

It was also because Paul remembered that our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against forces of wickedness in the spiritual realm. Every human being is someone that Jesus came to rescue and call to himself. Therefore, as followers of Jesus, we should always speak out of love. Jesus called us to love our enemies because he loves our enemies just as much as he loves us. And he loves us a lot.

There are so many hateful angry voices in our society today criticizing people for their politics or their religion or their lack of religion. As followers of Jesus, we should not be among them. We may be triggered by certain political ideologies or by certain religious opinions, but we should remember two things. First, the only reason we are not lost in confusion and sin is because of the grace of God. And two, if we are to help people find the truth and grace of Jesus, we must do it with humility, gentleness, and patience. Anger and hatred will only drive people further away from the truth. We cannot hate anyone into faith.

If there is any hope for the future of our culture and our country, it will be because people turn off the angry voices of hate and turn toward the grace and truth of Jesus. If people hear Christians as just one more angry voice in the media, we have failed to follow Jesus. There is no excuse for anyone being an angry Christian. Angry people are really just people who have been hurt, or who have been frustrated, or who are afraid. They need to know Jesus.

Yours in Christ, *Phil Nielsen*