

Our Worship?

“For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.” (Acts 17:23, ESV)

Poet Robert Frost once asserted, “Earth's the right place for love: I don't know where it's likely to go better.” While Frost did emphasize the importance of love in this life, does it seem that he rationalized away the need to focus first on the heavenly? God promises us that earthly love and heavenly love are linked. Paul encountered an opportunity to discuss this very subject when he was waiting for his fellow Christians in Athens. He happened to notice that the city was overflowing with idols, showing that many were not focusing on the heavenly. (Ac. 17:16) Paul gently helped the others to see that their worship was not as the Creator would have it and, Lord willing, we can do the same for others in our community.

Paul first went into the synagogue and discussed matters with the Jews and devout Athenians because he was troubled. Scripture tells us that Paul reacted by reasoning with those who could do something about the issue. (Ac. 17:17) He was convinced that the idols of man must be eliminated, so he also carried his conversation to others in the marketplace who just happened to be coming through. Paul personally brought the discussion to the faces and names of individual Athenians because each could form opinions about the issue and each could personally do something about it, subject to whatever opportunity each had. It was not just the leaders of the synagogue who had influence: each person speaking the truth affected the hearts and minds of those who heard.

Indeed, Paul encountered scoffers of the philosophers who lived in Athens. (Ac. 17:18) The preaching of Christ Jesus as the resurrected Son of God implies that all the other things that are called “god” or “gods” are not divine. As counterfeit \$100 bills are tested for authenticity, the presence of truth in the Athenian marketplace revealed what was not true and what was true. When we proclaim what God has revealed in scripture, we may encounter scoffers but let us maintain ourselves as Paul did.

When discussing the truth of scripture with those in the world, let us each consider and practice Paul's method. Paul identifies what is worshiped by those he speaks to. Next, he politely reveals how the truth has been close to each of us the entire time and encourages each to recognize by changing attitude and action. (Ac. 17:19-34) Paul viewed a situation that was not as God would have it be and helped others improve it. He became all things to all people (1 Cor. 9:22) and preached and taught the truth. The result was that some obeyed the message Paul preached. (Ac. 17:33-34) May the Lord allow us to have similar opportunities and results.