

From Apathy to Zeal

BY TYLER BROWN

One of the benefits of teaching here at Folsom is that there are opportunities for the teachers to learn, even in the younger classes. Recently, in the High School class, Randy Clark gave a lesson on “anger” that started with Matthew 5:22-26. In this lesson, an issue was discussed that I haven’t thought about in a long time. That issue is “apathy.”

We discussed things that get us angry when we shouldn’t be angry but then moved on to answer the question, “Are there things that we should get angry about?” If the answer to this question is yes, and I don’t find myself getting worked up about these things, then it seems that I have fallen victim to apathy.

As I read the definition of the word apathy, I can’t justify it having any place in my life as a Christian. The formal definition is, “a lack of interest, enthusiasm, concern.” There are plenty of things in the world that I am apathetic about, but I want to take a look at the role apathy plays in our lives as Christians, and how it is used as a tool by Satan. I’m proposing here that when we replace our zeal with apathy, Satan is gaining ground. Apathy is an emotion that puts us on the couch, sitting there watching our favorite TV program while our spiritual self rots.

In Acts 17:16 we read that Paul has entered Athens and is waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him. While he is in the city, he notices that it is full of idols. In verse 16 it says “his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that their city was full of idols.” Paul is stirred up, or moved to action, when he sees all of these idols that the Athenians are worshipping. Phrasing it differently, Paul is not apathetic to the situation. Paul perceives that these people are looking for God, that they are searching for something higher than themselves. In the process, they have fallen into pagan worship. Paul does not sit idly by thinking, “Well, if they truly want to find God, they will.” Paul’s zeal moves him to reason with them about this unknown god, the God that we serve.

“So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. 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 17:22-23.

Am I apathetic when I should be zealous? I believe that if we honestly answer this question, there are times in our lives in which we simply have lost interest or we just don’t care enough anymore to speak up. “I’m done with...”, “I’ve washed my hands of ...”, “I’ve been down that road too many times to...” are all colloquial ways of saying that we just don’t have the interest or enthusiasm to continue on with whatever the circumstance may be.

I am not trying to say that you need to get out on the street corner with a sign and picket the latest sin. What I am saying is that we are bombarded by sin so frequently that we are numb to it and say nothing! When someone says something inappropriate to us, such as a dirty joke or bad language, what do you do? When watching a show and someone uses the Lord’s name in vain, do we notice?

I like to use the word zeal here instead of anger as we look out our righteous provocation. Our zeal results in positive actions that are moved from an enthusiasm, conviction, and passion that is deep within. What Paul saw moved him to reason with the Athenians and, as we see in verse 34, "Some men joined and believed." Paul's zeal led to saved souls.

Apathy can't do that. Apathy leads to lost souls. Apathy can even lead to the loss of our soul. Our zeal is stirred up when we see sin, when we see or hear irreverence to God, and when we realize the lost state of someone's soul. Our zeal is fed by the Word of the Lord. As our zeal grows it is properly provoked and always acts in love.