

# Provoked

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As we look at the ever-growing and very-public immorality present in our world today, it is hard to not be frustrated or angry. On a recent visit to Disneyland with our grandchildren, I witnessed a number of male couples walking together and holding hands. I really don't want them exposed to that kind of behavior at such a young age. I thought of all the other children in the park at that time who were also seeing the same thing, or perhaps other expressions of affection.

Sadly, children don't have to go to Disneyland to be exposed to such behaviors. Society has so embraced this type of lifestyle that it is now being taught in elementary schools! Immorality is present in our television programs and the movies we watch. Most people applaud what the Bible clearly condemns as sin (cf. Rom. 1:26-27).

Seeing this moral degradation in our world often provokes us to anger. We complain and grumble. Like the prophet Habakuk, we helplessly wonder and worry about what is happening around us (Hab. 1:1-4).

Allow me to suggest a different approach to the moral problems of our world. This approach is nothing new. In fact, it is found in the pages of Scripture. Consider this scene from Paul's second missionary journey. The apostle was in the city of Athens and became provoked at what he saw.

Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was being **provoked** within him as he was observing the city full of idols.

Acts 17:16 (Emphasis Mine)

The Greek word translated "provoked" means, "to sharpen." Vine's notes that it is used metaphorically to signify "to rouse to anger." The word is only used twice in the New Testament; once in the passage under discussion, and once from the pen of Paul himself, who wrote that love "is not provoked" (1 Cor. 13:5).

When Paul saw all the idols in the city of Athens he was provoked. William Barclay commented, "It was said that there were more statues of the gods in Athens than in all the rest of Greece put together and that in Athens it was easier to meet a god than a man."

In his state of provocation, what did Paul do? Did he become angry and start complaining? Did he grumble and moan about how bad the world was becoming? Did he helplessly worry about what was happening to society? No! Remarkably, he did none of the things we typically do when we are provoked at what we see in the world. What he did do was something we need to start doing. Take a look:

**So** he was reasoning in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and in the market place every day with those who happened to be present.

Acts 17:17 (Emphasis Mine)

Paul was provoked at what he saw, "so" he sought to do something about it. The something he was doing about it was sharing the good news of the Gospel with any and all who would listen. While Paul may not have won the whole city of Athens to Christ, there were some who believed (Acts 17:34).

My dear brethren, grumbling and complaining about the growing immorality in the world is not going to solve anything. On the contrary, it is only going to add more stress, frustration, and worry to our lives. The way to change the world is one soul at a time. That one soul may change a family for generations, and that one family may change other families. SO, when we are provoked, let us be provoked to evangelism. Opportunities abound if we will stop complaining and simply open our eyes.