



Life Shines in Dialogue

“A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but perverseness in it breaks the spirit” (Proverbs 15:4).

Paul had a gentle tongue. He stood in “the midst of the Areopagus” surrounded by pagan altars with the Parthenon and temple of Athena towering before him. He had every right to condemn such idolatry with a harsh tongue. But Paul used a gentle tongue.

“Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious” (Acts 17:22). Paul complimented them and gently led them into a discourse on the futility of worshiping **“an image formed by the art and imagination of man”** (17:29). Quoting their own poets, he spoke of a living God who made everything, including them. Eventually without any “perverseness,” he proclaimed Jesus Christ risen from the dead, the “tree of life” that shines in darkness.

The results? **“Some mocked.”** Others said, **“We will hear you again.”** And **“some men joined him and believed”** (33, 34). God worked through Paul’s gentle tongue.

How’s your tongue as you stand in the middle of pagan ideology and disregard for God’s gift of life and new life from His creating and bleeding hands? We would have every right to condemn with angry tongues.

However, the word “gentle” has roots in legal language, the “concession of a legal right.” We may have every right to use an angry tongue, but if we want dialogue that leads to the Tree of Life, we should concede such a right and use a gentle tongue. This does not mean we concede truth. Paul spoke only truth to the Athenians. But he did so with a gentle tongue and a Gospel goal.

The Gospel is both the goal and source of our gentle tongue. **“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls”** (Matthew 11:29). Jesus spoke with a gentle tongue of nature, animals, birds. He told parables. He parried questions with questions, gently making people think. Oh, He spoke with a harsh tongue sometimes. But only to those religious leaders who rejected Him and refused to dialogue.

Ironically, He allowed those leaders to nail Him to a cross. Now this tongue would be silent, they supposed! No so! **“It is finished.”** And **“Peace be with you.”** He turned the tree of death into a tree of life. His gentle Spirit calls us into that life and gives us the gifts of forgiveness, life eternal, and the fruit of **“gentleness”** (Galatians 5:23).

Bear this fruit in dialogues about life. Everything is on our side—science, logic, reason. Use these with a gentle tongue. Use these to lead people to see the God who creates and redeems life and loves them.

“A gentle tongue is a tree of life” when it points to the Tree of Life.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, give us opportunity to dialogue using a gentle tongue and be at work changing hearts and minds. Amen.