

As I was listening to Pastor John's meditation during our most recent worship service, I noticed that he reinforced some of the ideas I wrote about in my Reflection last Monday. Specifically, he contrasted the limited gods of the polytheistic Athenians versus the God of the Old and New Testament, and quoted Paul's words "For in him we live and move and have our being." Last week I wrote about God responding to Moses' question by saying "I AM WHO I AM," establishing the difference between God's identity as being fundamental to being, and the gods of the surrounding cultures which played limited roles. I had found inspiration for my writing from several sources, and don't claim any credit for originality.

I have noticed this kind of thing many times before; ideas get passed around, often in subtle ways. We're not always aware of where our ideas come from. I once had a coworker who got very upset because he didn't think he was getting credit for a pump I designed. He said that I had gotten all the concepts from him. I couldn't change his mind, even when I showed him a prototype that had been built by another person on the team, well before either of us had thought about it.

But it's not just ideas that get passed around, it's also attitudes and ways of responding to each other and the world around us. We have an unconscious tendency to mimic what we hear and see. We develop biases, many of which have little or no foundation in fact, but they seem true because we've heard it so often. Advertisers know this and take advantage of it.

What ramifications does this have for the Christian community? For the last couple of weeks, Steve Fannin has written reflections based on Philippians 4:8, and encouraged us to think in positive and wholesome ways. This is not only for our own health, but also for the wellbeing of the community. In the book *If the Church were Christian*, the author Philip Gulley gives an example of a couple who lived out their faith in a very caring and Christ-like manner. Their influence deeply permeated the congregation in which they fellowshiped.

Generally I think of myself as a positive person, but I know that I also have a tendency towards cynicism. I do enjoy a bit of sarcastic humor now and then, but I have to be careful, because cynicism is a powerful negative force. I see a lot of it on social media. I'll sometimes see a nice bit of satire and think "ooh, that was

a real gotcha” and am tempted to re-post it, but I try to refrain. (I can understand a certain amount of venting, so long as it's not the dominant mood.)

For me, what I need to work on is being more affirming to others. I need to tell Ursula what a great job she did leading worship for the first time on Zoom. I need to follow the example of Ronda when she affirmed Christine in her new job. I need to let John know I don't take his work for granted. I need to ... the list goes on and on. I need to get better at what so many of you in this congregation already practice so well.

