

"Tell me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?"-1King 22:16

CHURCHES – GOD-CENTERED
OR MAN-CENTERED?

The Empty Promises of Atheism

Atheism stands opposed to the Bible, God's word (**2 Tim. 3:16-17**). Atheism claims the Bible is self-contradictory and harmful to man. Therefore, atheists reject it and try to get others to reject it as well. So, what does Atheism promise?

Atheism promises us a world without a Creator. In such a world men give homage to man, beast and nature (**Rom. 1:18-32**). It is a world in which human life is cheap, because, after all, man is just another animal. Abortion and euthanasia are accepted forms of population control, as well as a way to get rid of a "nuisance." Thankfully, the Bible tells us we are created in the image of God, giving us a deeper respect for all human life (**Gen. 1:26-27**).

Atheism promises us a world without definite standards of right and wrong. Everyone can do what is right in his own eyes (**cf. Judges 21:25**). In an atheistic world, man is the highest being, answerable only to himself. If a man wants to rape a woman, whose to say he is wrong? If a man wants to kill his neighbor and take his possessions, whose to say he is wrong? Isn't one man's opinion as good as another's? Without a Supreme Being to set the stand of good and evil, man is left to his own devices. Thankfully, God has given us the Bible, the truth, by which we may be guided (**Jn. 17:17; cf. Psa. 119:105**).

Atheism promises a world without any hope after this life. It tells us when

we die, that's it--no afterlife, no paradise, no heaven--nothing. In this hopeless world, what is the point of doing good? Why not just act out of your own selfish desires? After all, if there is no heaven, there is no hell either. Thankfully, the Word of God teaches there is hope of a better life beyond this world (**Mk. 12:18-27; Lk. 16:19-31; 2 Cor. 5:10**).

Atheism promises nothing, except corruption and destruction. Its promises are empty: no God, no standard of right and wrong, no hope.

Therefore, let us reject Atheism and accept the bountiful promises of God. - Steven F. Deaton

Religion by its very definition would seem to involve God. The word godly means God-centered. However, there are those who practice a religion that



is all about man rather than God. To say that such religion is godly is not to say that it is wicked, but simply that it is not centered in God.

Jesus described such people in his day in the words of Isaiah: "These people draw near to me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (**Matthew 15:8-9**). Paul writes of those who are "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" while at the same time "holding a form of godliness" (**2 Timothy 3:4-5**). Jude describes some who are in the church, but are "ungodly men, who turn the grace of God into licentiousness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ" (**Jude 4**).

Why would ungodly individuals continue to profess religion? Some do so, "supposing that godliness is a way of gain" (**1 Timothy 6:5**). Others, like Diotrophes (**3 John 9**), love the preeminence that they have attained in the church. Or, like the rulers of (**John 12:43**), they may love "the praise of men more than the praise of God."

Contrasting Churches

Local churches may be led either by godly or by ungodly men — that is, by men who are most concerned for God and things of the Spirit or by

HAVE YOU STUDIED YOUR BIBLE TODAY?

men whose concerns are primarily human and temporal. Such churches can be distinguished by the following:

Goals: Godly leaders have as their goal "the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things unto Him who is the head — Christ" (**Ephesians 4:12-15**). Men whose thinking is not dominated by God have as their primary goal increasing numbers — a big church. They consider numerical growth proof of God's approval.

Doctrine: Godly leaders are determined to abide in the doctrine of Christ and not to go beyond it (**2 John 9**). Not godly men, knowing that most of the public "will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (**2 Timothy 4:3-4**), provide the teachers that will tickle their ears.

Discipline: Godly leaders will insist that, in harmony with God's instructions, the church "withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly" (**2 Thessalonians 3:6**). Ungodly leaders advertise: "Come as you are" and boast that they are not judgmental, receiving everyone regardless of lifestyle.

Worship: Godly leaders insist that God be worshipped "acceptable with reverence and godly fear" (**Hebrews 12:28**) while ungodly men place great emphasis on "worship" that pleases the public and they seem concerned only that everyone leave "feeling good about themselves" and eager to return. Preachers: Godly leaders are not nearly as concerned with excellence of speech or of wisdom as that preachers be "determined not to know anything...save Jesus Christ and him crucified" (**1 Corinthians 2:1-2**). Ungodly leaders insist that

preachers be entertaining and personally popular, even with the world.

Activities: Godly leaders test every proposed action by all the scriptures, determined to "do all in the name of the Lord Jesus (**Colossians 3:17**), while ungodly leaders offer whatever people want — sports, entertainment, education, feasts, travel - with little apparent concern for what God wants.

Testing Ourselves

The Bible blesses those who "hunger and thirst after righteousness" (**Matthew 5:6**). By contrast it **condemns those who have "pleasure in unrighteousness"** (2 Thessalonians 2:12). Our taste in churches will help us determine which we are.

How will a person who has "pleasure in unrighteousness" feel about a church whose goal above all other things is to remake him into the image of Christ, whose doctrine is "the apostles' teaching," a church where he is put on notice that he must live a godly life or be disfellowshipped, where worship is designed exclusively to please God, where preachers preach only the word of God — reproving, rebuking and exhorting — where activities are altogether spiritual?

On the other hand, how will one who is hungry and thirsty for righteousness feel about a church he visits where he receives nothing but entertainment, where the "sermons" are little more than jokes and pop psychology, where sin is never rebuked, sinners never convicted or exhorted, and where activities are the same as those offered at a public school, theater or country club.

What kind of church are you seeking — the church of your choice or the church of God's choice? A godly church or an ungodly church?

- Sewell Hall

¹O LORD, you have searched me and known me!

²You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.

³You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.

⁴Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.

Psalm 139