

Atheists In The Pews

Text : Titus 1: 15-16, I John 2: 3-6

INTRODUCTION :

**A. We read about atheists and hear about them on TV,
but how many do you actually know?**

1. How many people in your peer group will openly espouse atheism ?
2. How many among your friends and relatives espouse atheism among friends ?
“Don’t tell mom and dad, but I don’t really believe in God or Jesus.”

B. In America it’s not culturally acceptable to openly speak against God.

1. In our PC society, one may disdain the thought of an all-powerful God, but he is expected to respect the right of others to believe as they will.
2. Thus, we may be associating with many who do not believe without knowing it.

C. If the truth be told, not all who attend church are actually believers.

1. Most religions encourage unbelievers to attend their services.
 - a. The goal is to be able to persuade them to become believers.
 - b. Evangelism is an essential part of New Testament Christianity. (**Matt 28: 18-20**)
2. Church attendance was a cultural thing, but is becoming less so.
 - a. Attending church was expected of all “good people.”
 - b. One who didn’t attend some church might have been looked down on by others.
3. 50 years ago church attendance was the primary social outlet for most people.
 - a. Friends, even mates were selected from among one’s religious fellowship.
 - b. Being a member of the correct church was essential to success in business.
4. Sadly, the social aspect of religion in American life is dwindling.
 - a. The world offers many social outlets to compete with the church.
 - b. Our society has become so mobile that longstanding relationships are rare.

D. Many who attend church are in a quandary, unable to decide if they really believe.

1. On one hand, they tend to agree with the Psalmist who said,
The fool has said in his heart, “There is no God.” Psal. 14:1
2. On the other hand, they don’t believe everything their church teaches.
3. Radical atheists advertise for “Closet Atheists” to come out into the open.

Sadly, the scriptures teach there is another significant group of atheists in the church and it is these that we wish to address by this lesson.

I. It is possible for one to believe he is a Christian, but actually be an atheist.

A. Men are often deceived by accepting man's wisdom about spiritual things.

1. **I Cor. 3: 18-20** Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, "He is the one who catches the wise in their craftiness"; ²⁰ and again, "The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless." (*Faith is not always logical.*)
2. No one can use earthly wisdom to analyze and to evaluate spiritual things.
 - a. A physicist and a physician approach problems from a different perspective.
 - b. Man's wisdom varies from culture to culture and era to era. *Spiritual is eternal.*
3. THEREFORE, people who try to use earthly reasoning to resolve spiritual issues arrive at errant conclusions. (i.e., *They deceive themselves.*)
 - a. Faith cannot always be proven by the scientific method.
 - b. Faith can seldom be summarized in the language of earthly logic.

B. Those who mix cultural values with spiritual values deceive themselves.

1. In order to become spiritually approved one must reject some things that are culturally accepted.

I Cor. 6: 9-11 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.
2. Why does the Lord's Apostle warns us about being deceived ?
Some are trying to deceive us saying that sinful actions will not condemn.
 - a. The practice of homosexuality is sinful. (*ALL sex outside marriage is sinful.*)
 - b. The drunkard or the drug addict is not sick; he is a sinner.
3. The one who believes that those who practice socially acceptable sins will escape God's wrath is deceiving himself or has been deceived.

Gal. 6: 7-8 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

C. The one who believes that he can practice sin and be a Christian is deceived.

I John 1: 6-8 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; ⁷ but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

1. Relationship with God is directly linked to one's lifestyle.
2. Everyone sins from time to time, **but** those who practice sin have no fellowship with God.
3. What does it mean to have **no** fellowship with God ?
 - a. Those who are spiritually alive are at one with God. (*Death = Separation*)
 - b. Those who are separated from God are lost eternally ... NOT saved.

II. Thus, those who profess faith, but still live a sinful lifestyle are atheists.

A. Faith produces fruit in one's life; i.e., faith changes one's life.

1. **I John 2: 3-6** By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. ⁴ The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; ⁵ but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: ⁶ the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

- a. How do I know I truly have a relationship with God ? *I seek to obey Him.*
- b. This is the basis upon which we examine ourselves to see if we are in faith.

II Cor. 13: 5- Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?

2. How do you make the decisions in your life ?
 - a. Do you just go through life doing basically what you want to do ?
"As long as it's not sinful and I want it, I'm going to do it."
 - b. Do you even consider the will of God in the decisions you make each day ?
 - c. Have you ever asked : *"Did God create me and die to save me so I could ... ?"*
3. God has a will for your life and your relationship with Him depends upon your seeking His will for your life and doing it. (*Synchronize Faith & Practice*)
 - a. God cares where you live and who your friends are. (*Don't deny His rule.*)
 - b. He cares what you do with your life ... each individual day. (*Submit each day.*)

B. The ONLY standard by which Jesus will test our faithfulness is His word.

1. **John 12: 47-48** If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. ⁴⁸ He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.
 - a. Those who will not accept the word of God will be lost.
 - b. Those who do not obey the word have not accepted it. (cf. **I Thes. 1:7-8**)
2. We will not be judged upon the basis of our interpretation of God's word, but upon God's own understanding of what He said in His word.
 - a. When God wrote His word He meant only one thing by it.
 - b. Many today try to take the power away from the word and instill it in the interpreter of the word. (*That's just your interpretation.*)
 - c. To do this is to deny God. (*It is to be an atheist.*)
3. The person who practices his own interpretation of the word is LOST.

Matt. 7: 21-23 Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in Heaven will enter. ²² Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' ²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

 - a. These who are being rejected are religious people.
 - b. They thought themselves to be saved and to be teachers of salvation.

III. Those who do not surrender their lives in obedience to Christ, deny His deity.

A. Those who live like people in the world deny Christ. (*Practicing atheists.*)

1. Our life can deny Christ more loudly than our lips can proclaim Him.

Tit. 1: 16- They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.
2. **Example :**

I Tim. 5: 8- But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

B. Jesus expressed frustration with those whose walk does not match their talk.

1. **Luke 6: 46-** Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?
2. When one becomes a Christian, the spirit begins changing him from within.

Phil. 3: 12-13 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

- a. You have a will for your life and God also has a will for your life.
 - b. The one who loves God surrenders his will to God's will. (*Atheists don't.*)
 3. Those who are truly believers have their attitude changed so that it conforms to that of Christ. This change of attitude then results in a change of lifestyle.
- Gal. 5: 16** But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.
- a. The desires are still there, but the will to fulfill the desires is no longer there.
 - b. When you don't consider God, you deny His authority, **you deny His deity.**
 4. Religion is only of value when one's will is surrendered to Christ, to God.

James 1: 26 - If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this man's religion is worthless.

(*Those in Matt 7:21-23 had a worthless religion.*)

- a. To "bridle" is to actively subdue.
- b. One's faith is only of value when it is actively used to subdue his fleshly desires.

**An atheist is anyone who rejects the rule of God in his life.
Atheism is not just restricted to those who verbalize a rejection of Christ.**

CONCLUSION :

- A. Each of us must be careful that we don't practice atheism while espousing faith.
- B. We must be aware that we are ambassadors for Christ so everything we do or say reflects upon Him and His church.
 1. **Tit. 2: 4-5** ... so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵ to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.

2. We must follow the example of the Apostles who went before us :

II Cor. 6: 1, 3 And working together *with Him*, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain —... — ³ giving no cause for offense in anything, so that the ministry will not be discredited, ...

- C. We must all join the Apostle Paul in praying :

I Thes. 1: 11-12 To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, ¹² so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and *the* Lord Jesus Christ

INVITATION :

Lesson Text :

Titus 1: 15-16

¹⁵ To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. ¹⁶ They profess to know God, but by *their* deeds they deny *Him*, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.

I John 2: 3-6

³ By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. ⁴ The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; ⁵ but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: ⁶ the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

(*Repeat*)

Titus 1: 16

¹⁶ They profess to know God, but by *their* deeds they deny *Him*, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.