

ATHEISTS ARE MADE, NOT BORN - The Biblical Psychology of Modern Atheism - Part four

Teaching #1927 - Sunday, November 20th, 2016 - 6:00 p.m.

Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

ENEMIES OF GOD

Romans 1:18, 20-23, 28, 32 - “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth....[20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. [21] For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things....[28] And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done....[32] Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”

Romans 5:10 - “For if while *we were enemies* we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”

Romans 8:7 - “For the mind that is set on the flesh *is hostile to God*, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot.”

Colossians 1:21 - “And you, who once were alienated and *hostile in mind*, doing evil deeds...”

James 4:4 - “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is *enmity with God?* Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world *makes himself an enemy of God.*”

The unspoken myth surrounding atheism is they are honest seekers of God who just can’t find Him. And the starting place of divine revelation is this is untrue. It is untrue even if atheists ***think*** it is true.

The first thing to say about all of these verses is they are a description of ***all*** people without Christ. This is not the Bible’s picture of a handful of really ***bad*** people - child molesters, Nazi war criminals, mafia drug lords, etc. These verses describe the ***common moral stance*** of our fallen world.

These are not politically correct verses. They feel intolerant and inappropriate when read carefully. They contradict almost everything we hear today about what has to be a very large portion of the population of our planet. The common understanding in much of the church today is that this world isn’t happy with the church and that’s the church’s fault. We Christians have been too obsessed with sin and damnation to the point that those outside the church can’t even relate to us. The church is too ***prickly*** - too ***judgmental*** - for its message to appeal to those who don’t embrace Christ.

The world, in popular Christian perception, is full of relatively beautiful people It’s full of ***seekers*** who just need a little more information and love. If we insiders will just speak their language and show more love they’ll gladly embrace Jesus. All they need is just a bit of a ***“hand up”*** from a culturally relevant church.

And you can’t help but sense the huge ***fork in the road***. We can’t ignore the discrepancy between these two

pictures of the lost. If the lost are just beautiful people seeking God, Paul and the rest of the New Testament are out to lunch. And if the New Testament picture framed in our opening texts is accurate the church needs to adjust its thinking and approach to evangelism. Either way this is too big an issue to skirt around.

Four questions seem unavoidable tonight. ***First, are those outside of Christ really enemies of God? Second, if so, do they know they are God's enemies? Third, how does this latent enmity manifest itself? And fourth, what can be done about this problem in view of the church's call to reach the lost?***

1) ARE THOSE OUTSIDE OF CHRIST REALLY ENEMIES OF GOD?

Please don't miss the meaning here. There is no question here about God sending His Son to die for **everyone**. God's longing to **reach** these people isn't at issue. The Bible is too clear and too blunt to miss God's heart:

2 Peter 3:9 - "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

1 John 2:2 - "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."

There's no mistaking God's heart here. John **equates** the reach of the atoning work of Christ for **Christians** ("**our sins**" - and the sins of everyone else on the planet - "**...the sins of the whole world**"). God's not wanting **anyone** to perish. He wants **everyone** to repent. That's why He sent God the Son to be the propitiation for the **whole world's sin**. So, clearly, God is out to reach His enemies. But that doesn't undo the fact that they are still repeatedly called His **enemies** throughout the New Testament.

Let's start with some basics. When the New Testament calls those apart from Christ God's enemies it does **not** mean they can't be very nice persons. In other words, their **enmity** relates directly to **God**, not the **world** in general. They exhibit **love** in virtually all their relationships. They may be good parents and neighbors. They are only enemies of **God**. In other words, we aren't in a position to see anything **unlovely** in them the way **God** would see what's unlovely in them because their enmity is directly only at **God** - not at **us**.

Our opening texts couldn't be clearer. The basic **default** stance of the worldly mind - and its key problem in relation to God - isn't one of mere **ignorance** - **Romans 1:18, 20, 28** - "**For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth....[20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse....[28] And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done."**

So the problem here is one of **suppression of known truth**. This is why Paul speaks of the great "**exchange**" willingly made - **Romans 1:23** - "**....and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.**"

This is the work of enemies. There has been a denial of God's rights. There has been a declaration of opposing loyalties. There has been a deliberate refusal to bow and worship. In fact, there has been the

replacement of proper devotion to the Creator with nothing but **self-love and worship**.

This is our world. Fifty thousand crammed into the Temple called Roger's Center. Most of our resources devoted to a ridiculously sinful amount of self-indulgence. A whole generation who knows more about the Kardashians than the New Testament account of Jesus Christ.

Without divine revelation we have no way of knowing that this isn't just **normal** life. The fact that so many don't see anything **offensive** in these choices is only further **evidence** of the depth of rebellion. In exactly the same way the American South went so many years seeing nothing morally offensive about **slavery**, our world - and many sympathetic church people - sees nothing morally offensive about not reverently honoring God above all else.

We won't have any capacity at all to see the sinister underbelly of these horribly misdirected passions. Our opening texts are the only source for an **honest perspective** on why this situation exists. It **isn't** accidental. It has ugly, usually unconsidered roots. It's a manifestation of the deeply rooted conspiracy against God.

2) **DO ALL THESE PEOPLE KNOW THEY ARE ENEMIES OF GOD?**

I believe at some point they do. But only for a while. Consider these texts:

Matthew 7:21-23 - "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. [22] On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' [23] And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"

I don't think these people were aware of their **un-relatedness** to the Lord. It seems they were expecting a warmer welcome than they received. I can't **prove** that from the text, but that's the way it reads to me. They seem genuinely shocked to be left on the outside.

So this text reveals an **unawareness** to their own spiritual condition. But that's as far as we can follow this account. We're told nothing about how these religious people **got to this place of lostness**. And that's because Jesus' only point in this parable is to reveal **words and miracles aren't enough**. The whole Sermon on the Mount is about **heart devotion**.

These people hadn't constructed their whole lives around devotion to the Lordship of Jesus, as Jesus makes clear in His concluding remarks in **verses 24-27** - "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. [25] And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. [26] And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. [27] And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

As to how these people came to such self-ignorance we need another text. And, fortunately, we have one - **Romans 1:18-21** - "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness **suppress the truth**. [19] For **what can be**

known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. [21] For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

Lesser truth humbly received makes room for greater truth. But lesser, common, conscience revealed truths unwelcomed, results in even the knowledge of *those* truths taken away - **Luke 8:18** - “**Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.**”

3) **HOW DO ENEMIES OF GOD REVEAL THIS CONDITION?**

Our text reveals *two manifestations* of enmity toward God. We'll look at the first tonight:

Romans 1:21-23 - “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.”

God isn't just *rejected*. He is *replaced*. People can't live without expressing *devotion*. It's the way our Creator made us. The common manifestation of enmity toward God is *misdirected love*. And the text leaves no doubt as to where God's enemies find their deepest joy. The *divine* is removed. The *human* is exalted.

“Claiming to be wise” (22). There is no *humility* here. Human wisdom - the *cultural perspective* - replaces *divine revelation*. *Tolerance* trumps holiness and the absolute rights of our sovereign Creator. We are more troubled about the feelings of others than the grieving of God. However you cut it, enemies of God are more transfixed by what they can embrace “resembling mortal man” (23). We worship what is most like *us*. Enemies of God worship what exalts and pleases and delights and secures and fascinates *themselves*.

I need to quickly add just one more idea under this third point:

Matthew 6:24 - “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

I don't think anyone should read those words without asking, “Why not? Why can't I love one master more and still love the other less?” It doesn't feel like an unreasonable question.

But Jesus seems adamant. When *God* is placed on the balance of the heart's devotion He is automatically “*hated*” or “*despised*” when He is *compared* with anything else. Notice. ***Enemies of God aren't created by hating God directly. Enemies of God are spontaneously created by affection toward other interests.***

This means very few people constantly *feel* like they're enemies of God. That's because their enmity against God only arises when He challenges something they hold dear. And God will *always* challenge

whatever else we love most. He's not an apparent enemy in the worship service. He's not an apparent enemy at the grace and the family dinner. He's surely not an apparent enemy when we go to Him in a time of emergency.

But none of those times *reveals* my true relationship with God. That I am God's enemy will only surface to full awareness when there is an actual *comparison* of my devotion to Him with my devotion to something else He challenges.

In other words, Jesus is reminding us no one merely *dabbles* with either love for God or the things of this world. Each love *draws* and each love *consumes*. This is the *nature* of love. Like two gigantic *magnets*, each one pulls you more and more toward itself. It's impossible to just stay in the middle *between* these competing Masters.

Jesus' words need to be heard with *faith* that they're true. That's because we all *think* we are safer with *some* devotion to this world than we really are. It never dawns on us until it's too late that there is no such thing as *dating* the world while being *married* to Christ - **James 4:4** - "**You *adulterous* people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.**"

Notice those biting words: "**...friendship with the world is enmity with God...**" That's just what friendship with the world *is*. Like two plus two *is* four. How many people will lift their hands singing praise choruses in churches today who are God's avowed *enemies*?

4) **IF THIS IS TRUE, WHAT SHOULD BE THE CHURCH'S MESSAGE TO THIS WORLD?**

Are people going to like hearing this from us? Wouldn't we have more success minimizing this part of the truth? Surely nobody is going to feel flattered being called an *enemy of God*.

Perhaps the Bible can shed light on this complicated subject:

Romans 5:8-11 - "...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. [9] Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. [10] For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. [11] More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."

Evidently Paul feels he can't properly explain the *glory* of the gospel message without including the fact that it includes the *reconciliation of enemies*. God's grace doesn't just *erase past guilt*. It *transforms enemies into children of God*.

And the change that takes place in the human heart can only be accomplished by the full *wonder of this message*. What can turn an enemy into a worshiper of God? Rules won't. Judgment won't. Religion won't. ***The heart of an enemy can only be reached by unexplainable mercy and love.***

If this part of the gospel message is removed so is the ***proper ground of deep repentance before God.*** If all persons outside of Christ need is a helping hand up because they're basically beautiful people seeking the same truth we all are, then they have no need to embrace the cross of Jesus Christ.

No. Keep the wonder in the full message of God's grace. He forgives sinners. And He adopts enemies into the family of God.