

God's Critique Of Man's Religion

By: Keith Keyser

For centuries skeptics have attacked Christianity based on religiously-inspired atrocities. Since so much evil is perpetrated in the name of God, they wonder how it still retains credibility in the modern world. Recent child abuse scandals by supposedly spiritual figures, coupled with the ubiquitous specter of jihad from other religious quarters, move opponents of belief in God to renew their assault on every kind of theism. Of course, the critics ignore that all belief systems are not equal. Atheism and other secular worldviews also have bloodstained hands.¹ It is true that many religious groups have condoned violence and other atrocious acts. History shows that horrible things have even been perpetrated in the name of Christ. Nonetheless, neither Christ nor biblical Christianity advocates evil in any form. In fact, the Bible offers the best criticism of human-invented religion – the genuine article raises the most strident voice of protest against the counterfeits.

As in modern times, the ancient world was multicultural in its society and pluralistic in its belief systems. Whether one looks at the Old or New Testament eras, there was no shortage of brutality and perversion perpetuated in the name of God or the gods. The Bible recognizes this phenomenon, and unhesitatingly condemns it. Child sacrifice, sexual immorality, and self-mutilation in the adoration of false deities are all repudiated by the Scriptures.

You Are What You Worship

Before Israel entered Canaan, the Lord instructed them concerning their proper behavior in the land where He was settling them. If they followed His directions all would be well: their crops and they would prosper. On the contrary, if they engaged in the iniquitous practices of the Egyptians from where they came – or the Canaanites for that matter – they would be judged. The list of perverse practices showed that the nations who occupied the land before them were given to every form carnal dissipation (Lev. 18.) Other passages make it clear that their immorality was fueled by the debased religions to which they adhered. For example, Deuteronomy 12:29-31 says:

When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; **for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.** [Emphasis mine.]

The type of gods that they worshipped led them into unspeakably cruel acts. Similarly, in his catalogue of human iniquity, Paul demonstrates the correlation between venerating beasts and behaving like them (Rom. 1:22-32.)

Condemning Religion's Softer Side

Christianity's criticism of false spiritual systems is not limited, however, to the grotesque excesses of ancient and modern idol worship. It also takes on the more respectable looking religions, labeling them all as evil, no matter how refined their image. The Lord Jesus reserved some of His strongest denunciations for liberal and conservative religious groups such as the Sadducees, scribes, and the Pharisees. To sample one example of His criticism towards them, consider the following: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men's* bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Matt. 23:27-28.)

These groups professed to love God, yet circumvented His will as revealed in the Scriptures by their contorted legal thinking and man-centered philosophies. Although the scribes and Pharisees knew the Bible letter-perfect, they left the weightier matters of the law undone (Matt. 23:23.) They majored on minors, and presented a caricature of the Lord to the nation of Israel. Rather than directing people to the God-given law, they obscured its tenets through their human traditions (Matt. 15:1-3.) Their outward zeal cloaked their inward avarice, and they defrauded the weak and poor under a pretense of piety (Matt. 23:14.) The Sadducees, in turn, exploited the temple for pecuniary gain (John 2:16.)

Ecumenical Murder

It is clear that opposition to the Lord's anointed makes strange bedfellows. Although they differed on numerous points of doctrine and practice, the Pharisees and Sadducees united in their opposition to Jesus of Nazareth. Even nonreligious, political groups like the Herodians joined them in their plot to murder Christ (Mk. 3:6.) So Calvary reveals the true face of things: secular and religious – those who collaborated with Rome and those who awaited a Messiah to deliver them politically – joined to execute the perfect Man who also is God manifest in the flesh. The chief priests and Pharisees possessed scruples about ceremonial defilement on the Sabbath, but no compunctions about employing false witnesses to condemn Christ (John 18:28; Matt. 26:59-62.) They demanded proof of His identity, but refused to acknowledge what the signs indicated. Such actions were hypocritical, and religions which lead men to murder the perfectly righteous One are evil.

Today religions on the right and left condone and cover up all sorts of human evil. From outright immorality to character flaws that warp families and harm others, man's religions affirm that man can overcome global and personal wickedness by self-effort. They minimize sin and lower the bar of God's holy standard in their efforts to appear better than they are. They invent

scriptures, sacrifices, and ceremonies which lead billions to a lost eternity in hell. Despite their widely divergent beliefs and practices, religions the world over reject the biblical Christ and His unvaryingly holy claims. They will accept Him as prophet, ethicist, swami, sage, or “a god,” but they cannot endure the exclusive One who is “the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn. 14:6.) Consequently, wickedness still goes on under a spiritual cloak and the true God who speaks through the Bible condemns their falsehood.

ⁱ Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Mao Zedong collectively account for hundreds of millions of murders, not to mention Enver Hoxha, Pol Pot, Saddam Hussein, Idi Amin, Augusto Pinochet, Timothy McVeigh, Charles Manson, and many others. If there is no God then how can one condemn such atrocities? Secularism offers no universal arbiter of truth; therefore, there is no ultimate justice and no lasting hope apart from the Christian God.