

IF YOU ARE NOT AN ATHEIST...

Don't Act Like One!

It was your typical governmental cover-up. He was a man with an incredible amount of power and he is used to having his way. He's married but he meets a beautiful woman. Secret, sinful, sexual desires begin to well up in his heart. He learns that she too is married, but after making discreet arrangements, he soon commits adultery. Unfortunately, the woman gets pregnant and so now begins the inevitable but familiar cover-up. Using his authority, the official has the woman's husband, who is a soldier on duty in a distant field of battle, called home in hopes of hiding his adultery. When that doesn't work, he makes sure that the husband becomes another battlefield casualty.

Now, you have probably guessed that I am not speaking about some present day senator or congressman. Unfortunately, I could be, couldn't I? However, I'm referring to something that happened more than three thousand years ago involving the man we know as King David. If you want, you can read that sad, sordid story for yourself in the 11th chapter of 2 Samuel. Nevertheless, many people have a really difficult time with that story because David is so well-known as the man after God's own heart. Of course that was said of David prior to the time that he sinned with Bathsheba (1 Samuel 13:14).

I have referred to this story because it is one of the most vivid examples of a person doing the exact opposite of what he or she is supposed to do, of being the exact opposite of what he or she is supposed to be.

Someone sent me an email recently that described a man doing the right thing by stopping at an intersection even though he could have stepped on it and sped through on a yellow light. The lady behind him, however, was not quite so noble. She had fully expected the man to speed on through so she had to slam on her brakes, which upset her greatly so she laid on the horn and called him every name in the book! She was still in the middle of her rant when a police officer tapped her window and ordered her to get out of the car and put her hands up. She was taken to the police station where she was photographed and fingerprinted and put in a holding cell. An hour or so later, she was released and when she went to pick up her personal things, she met the officer that had arrested her. He said, "I apologize for the mistake, but you see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn and cussing a blue streak at the guy in front of you. It's then that I noticed the bumper sticker, "What Would Jesus Do?" and another one that said, "Follow me to Sunday School." Naturally, I assumed you had stolen the car!"

That may hit too close to home to be funny, but I wonder if we realize how many times every day that we may be thinking and speaking and acting like non-believers, like non-Christians? That is why this morning my message to you is this: *"If You are not an atheist, then don't act like one!"*

Now that may seem a bit harsh or extreme but hopefully you will get my point. Last Sunday evening we watched a video presentation entitled *Evolution vs. God*. In that presentation, the speaker, a man named Ray Comfort was on the campus of probably USC or UCLA. He interviewed a number of students and science professors, almost all of whom said they were atheists. And then, before the video was finished he began asking these people if they had ever told a lie, and of course all of them freely admitted they did. Then he asked them if they ever took something that didn't belong to them, in other words, steal. Again they all admitted that they did. Then he asked them if they ever entertained lustful thoughts, and once again, they all said they did, even though the lady professor said "not lately!" He then asked them if they ever blasphemed God, if they ever used the name of God in vain, and once again, every one of these so-called atheists said they did.

Well, I thought about that and I thought to myself, "*You know, we are not surprised to learn that atheists do these things, but what about when professing Christians do them? How are we to explain it when Christians think and act like absolute unbelievers?*" Naturally, I am using the word Christian in its loosest sense this morning.

It seems to me that atheism is on the rise in this nation. Whether or not that is true is a little hard to prove one way or the other. It may be that the small percent of people who really are atheists are just becoming more vocal, more visible. Maybe that is what is happening, but we seem to be hearing more about atheists these days, and we are seeing them have more and more influence. Brother Joe brought me this cartoon this past Wednesday night. It is the cartoon called "Shoe." Shoe is a newspaper reporter and his editor says to him, "An atheist has won the right to protest in the town square." Then he says, "I need a headline." Shoe says, "How about, "Atheist's prayers answered!"

Well, it seems a lot of atheist's prayers are getting answered these days.

But there is another kind of atheism that is even more disturbing. It even has a name in the popular media today. It is called, *Christian atheism*. Craig Groeschel is the author of a popular book entitled, *The Christian Atheist*. Subtitled, "Believing in God, but living as if He doesn't exist." Naturally there is no such thing. We would say that's an oxymoron, which is an expression or statement that is self-contradictory. Even so, when professing Christians do things atheists do; when they act in ways that would be typical of atheists, Unfortunately the label fits, doesn't it? So, I am here this morning to say to you, "If you are not an atheist, please don't act like one!"

Atheists, of course, are people who deny that God exists. They might even boldly claim that God does not exist. Of course they cannot possibly know that unless they can prove that they know everything there is to know about everything. Otherwise, the one thing they might not know might be God Himself. Nevertheless, they do not believe in the existence of a God such as the one you and I believe in and worship.

Essentially atheism is the belief that there is no God but because of that belief, there are a number of other things that you can say about atheists. We had an illustration of that last Sunday night when the speaker asked one of the professors if he had ever blasphemed God. The man replied that since he didn't believe in God, he could hardly be guilty of blaspheming God. But of course, what he believed or didn't believe about God did not change reality one bit. If there is a God (and there is), then blasphemy is a sin regardless of whether one believes in God or not.

There are certain things that one can expect Atheists to do and believe. For example, you would expect atheists to stay away from places of Bible study and worship. Maybe some go to places like that but there probably aren't many. But what about those who profess to be Christians who stay away from such times? I wonder about that. If you are a Christian you would think you would want to be there very much. If your regular practice is to skip Bible study, I ask you, is that more consistent with what an atheist would do or what a Christian would do? Well, we know the answer to that, do we not?

It is doubtful if many atheists pray. There is an old saying that there are no atheists in foxholes, and that might be true, I don't know. I doubt if you find most atheists spending much time in prayer, if any, but what about you? You are not an atheist and so you probably spend a lot of time praying. Atheists don't pray because they don't believe in God, so I wonder why people who profess to be Christians do not spend much time in prayer? I hope you think that is a good question.

I don't suppose most atheists spend a lot of time reading and studying the Bible either. There probably are some but for the most part most do not. Many years ago I attended Wichita State University for a year and I had a professor, Dr. Mitchell, who professed to being an atheist. Even so, he was somewhat aware of what the Bible says, and from time to time, he would cite scripture. I am sure he is not typical of most atheists, many of whom have an absolute disdain and hatred for the Scriptures. They have no desire or reason to pick it up daily and read it and think about what it says. But what about you? You are a Christian right? You are not an atheist, so what does your practice of reading and studying the Bible look like? Like that of the atheist, or a Christian?

Reportedly, most atheists are not real charitable. Many of them claim to be humanists but they are really not very humanitarian. They don't give much to charitable causes; statistically, it is far below the norm. I am sure very little of their money is given to churches or religious organizations. Why should they? They don't believe in what those churches stand for or represent. That doesn't surprise us; in fact we would be more surprised if atheists did make frequent or generous contributions to a church! On the other hand, you would think that Christians would be very eager and generous in their giving and financial support of the church and the things they say they believe in. So think about it and think about your own practice of giving. Does it look more like that of the atheist or a Christian?

Now, if some of these things are making you feel a little uncomfortable, I think that is a good thing. I think it is good that we get challenged to do some serious thinking about our Christianity. Is it real or not?

Well, let's go on. Morally speaking, we are not surprised if atheists give themselves over to things that are sinful and ungodly. **Romans 1** says that is to be expected, doesn't it? Beginning in **verse 21**, Paul wrote:

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.

24) Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25) because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

26) For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27) and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

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. 29) They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30) slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31) foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32) Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

I found it pretty disturbing that so many of those people who were interviewed for that video we saw last week spoke so freely about the sinful and ungodly things they did. There didn't seem to be any shame in their talking about it. You see, in their mind, if there is no God, there cannot be any absolutes. In their worldview, there is nothing absolutely right or wrong; everything is relative. We shouldn't be surprised by anything done by people operating out of an atheistic mindset. If they lie, we are not surprised. If they steal, we are not surprised. If they do drugs and get drunk, we are not surprised. Given what they believe about this world being nothing but a cosmic accident, it is easy to see why they might want to blot that out of their minds. If they lust and commit fornication and are into pornography, we are not surprised. We expect those who do not believe in God to act like that. But you are not like that, are you? After all, you are a Christian. There are, however, people who profess to be a Christians who do all these things. According to researchers, the percentage of those who consider themselves Christians, who drink and do drugs, is not much different than the national

norm. The rate of marital affairs and divorce is about the same for those who profess to be Christians as it is for those not making that claim. Isn't it interesting that most of the people who are incarcerated in our jails and prisons claim to be Christians? If they are Christians, what are they doing in jail for things like stealing, drugs, rape and murder?

There is not a lot of difference in how sexually active teens are that go to church compared with those that don't. About the same percentage are getting pregnant and having abortions. They are drinking and doing drugs. They have no problem with telling a little lie. They are major consumers of online pornography. The rants and ramblings on Facebook of some people who profess to be Christians would make a sailor blush! No wonder they call it, Christian atheism!

There are Christians who won't work, won't be responsible, won't pay their bills. There are Christians, whose days are filled with gossip and slander, backbiting and bickering. We have Christian husbands who are insulting and abusive to their wives. We have Christian women who are addicted to prescription pain killers and gambling. There are so-called Christian parents who neglect and abuse their children and get caught up in things that even the world finds shocking. Paul talked about the brother in Corinth whose immoral behavior was shocking even among the pagans! You may recall that the infamous BTK killer up in Wichita was President of his church's leadership council. Again, we wouldn't be shocked or surprised to learn these were things being done by people who profess to be atheists but shouldn't it surprise us to find these things being done by people who claim to be Christians?

Atheists do not worry about whether something is sinful or not and they could care less whether or not something is Biblical or scriptural. That doesn't matter to them, but did you know there are a lot of professing Christians that have exactly the same attitude. Christian atheism! Again I say brethren, if you are not an atheist, don't live like one!

Atheists do not concern themselves with the prospect of judgment day. They don't believe in God, they don't believe that there is a heaven or a hell, and they don't believe that there is ever going to be a time when they will be accountable for everything they have thought, said or done in this life. But think about it brethren, is there any practical difference between an atheist who doesn't believe in any of these things and the person who says he does but acts as if He doesn't?

Atheists do not spend any of their time trying to teach and share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others. They don't believe that there is a heaven or a hell so they have no interest and invest no effort in trying to lead others to the way of salvation that is in Christ. But what about you? You do, don't you? After all, you are not an atheist; you are a Christian, right? Talking to others about God and trying to teach them the gospel is something you probably do all the time.

Do you see why I've said, "If you are not an atheist, do not act like one?" Or maybe we could put that another way. If you claim to be a Christian, then do act like it. We need to make up our minds about these things. I am reminded of Joshua's challenge to Israel as he neared the end of his life. In **Joshua 24**, the venerable leader said,

"Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. 15) And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

We need to ask ourselves, "Am I a Christian, or am I an atheist? And if I am a Christian, is that what my thinking shows? Is that what comes out of my mouth shows? Is that what my values and morals show? Is that what my habits and practices show, or do these things really reveal that I'm just a Christian atheist?"

David committed a great sin. It wasn't just a sin against Bathsheba or her husband Uriah. It was against God. He was no longer the man after God's own heart, and so the truth is, the day Samuel confronted him turned out to be one of the greatest blessings in his life. If there are any here today who have been practicing Christian atheism, I hope you will experience the same thing. I didn't preach this lesson to condemn anyone, but to get us all to think. We can lie to ourselves but we cannot lie to God. We can say that we are Christians, but if we are acting like atheists, what we say doesn't matter.

When David realized that he had sinned he was immediately convicted and immediately confessed that sin. If that is what you need to do this morning, I urge you to do what a Christian would do. An atheist would just let all of this go in one ear and out the other. But a Christian, a real Christian, is someone who gets convicted by the Word of the Lord, and immediately humbles themselves before the Lord. If you need to do that this morning, if we can be of help to you in any way, please come while we stand and sing.

[Invitation]

(Preached 01/19/14 by Don Huddleston at the Hartford Avenue Church of Christ, Ponca City, OK)