

If There Is No God

M. W. Bassford, 9-25-11

Most people who have been Christians for any length of time whatsoever have heard Psalm 53:1. The first part of this verse resonates with us because any rejection of God strikes us as foolish. How can anyone look up at the night sky, or marvel at the delicacy and beauty of a flower, or study the matchless depths of the inspired word, and doubt that those things are the product of a supernatural Creator? Anybody with a lick of sense knows better than that!

However, there's another sense in which this passage is true. The atheist does not reject God reluctantly. Instead, he rejects God eagerly, because deep down inside himself, he does not wish to believe. He would rather live in a reality in which there is no God than in one in which God exists. Men can develop this will to disbelieve for any number of reasons. Sometimes, they choose to be irreligious because they are disgusted by the evil and the hypocrisy of the religious. In one Christian family of my acquaintance, both of a man's sons rejected Christ because they saw their father consistently teach one thing and do another. More often, atheists-to-be feel limited by the moral restrictions that God and His word place on them, and so they turn away from God to get rid of the restrictions. They think that life is better lived apart from God's law, and once they reject that law along with God, they can really start having fun.

Sadly, it doesn't work that way. Obviously, the atheist has nothing to look forward to in the life to come, but even in this life, disbelief in God carries with it a number of dreadful consequences, and these consequences go far beyond rejecting religious hypocrisy or even God's rules about what we may do. In this country, whether we realize it or not, belief in God is central to our philosophical perspective, and so many of the rights and privileges that we enjoy are founded on that belief in God. If we remove the foundation, then the structure of rights itself must also collapse.

Strictly speaking, this is not proof of the existence of God. However, it is reason to consider very carefully indeed before we reject Him. Let's look, then, at the logical results if there is no God.

Effects on Human Rights.

One of the first concepts to suffer if there is no God is **HUMAN DISTINCTIVENESS**. The Psalmist describes what sets us apart from all the animals in Psalm 8:6-8. We have dominion over the earth and its creatures because God has given us that dominion, and different rules apply to us than to animals. We understand this on an individual level, and the difference is equally apparent in the rules that our governments make. It's relatively easy for any of us to purchase a license to shoot deer, but only James Bond has a license to shoot people.

However, when we remove God from the picture, the distinction between man and beast breaks down. In a godless world, presumably the deer and I are both here because we both evolved to be here. We are essentially the same. The only difference between the deer and me is that I'm smarter, and I can set an ambush for the deer and kill him. If my cunning entitles me to kill the deer, then it also entitles me to set traps for passersby in dark alleys, shoot them, and rob them. After all, if I can do it to the one animal, I can do it to the other animal too, right?

We like to poke fun at PETA advocates and their "Meat Is Murder!" slogans, but from a certain perspective, they make sense. If we're all just animals together, and I want to defend my right to life as an animal, then that principle requires me to defend the lives of all the other animals. We all arose from the protoplasmic slime together, so we should be treated equally. If one of the other animals is treated badly by human beings, then I can expect to be treated badly too. The PETA people aren't just worried about Bambi and Thumper. They're worried about themselves, and the only way they see to protect themselves is by protecting all the animals. That's what they're driven to in a world without God.

The second consequence if there is no God is that **HUMAN VALUE** also declines. Just like our distinctiveness, our value is based on God's actions, as we see from Genesis 2:7. God breathed His divine breath into Adam's nostrils, and that same eternal spirit is present in every one of Adam's children. That means that the humblest street-sweeper out there contains something within himself that is worth more than the world and everything in it, because he is the bearer of an immortal soul. Every single one of us, then, is precious beyond price, simply because we exist.

This may sound arrogant, but it's not. This isn't just the value that we set on ourselves. It's the value that God has placed on us. Look, for instance, at 1 Peter 1:18-19. This passage tells us that God purchased us out of sin with the most valuable thing imaginable—the precious blood of His Son. God is no dummy. He didn't overvalue us. Instead, He knew exactly what He was purchasing and decided that we were worth it. This is something that I love to mention when I'm studying with people who are struggling with depression or other mental illness. Whenever we get down on ourselves, whenever we start feeling worthless or thinking that nobody loves us, we could not be more wrong. No human being is insignificant to God, and no matter how humble we are, we can take comfort in His boundless love.

However, if there is no God, we do not have that divine spark within us, and any argument for our intrinsic worth collapses. Instead of being valuable for what we are, we must become valuable by what we do. Rich people have

value because they have lots of money, popular people have value because they have lots of friends, and if we are neither rich nor popular, in a world without God, we don't have much value at all. Is it any wonder that as the significance of God declines in our country, the rates of depression and mental illness increase? The voice of a godless age tells us that unless we are exceptional in some way, we are worthless people, and that is a message that comes through loud and clear.

Likewise, the idea of **HUMAN RIGHTS** cannot long be maintained in a society without God. Paul describes the source of our gifts in Acts 17:24-25. All of the good things we have are not the result of chance or of our own hard work. Instead, they are the gift of a benevolent God, who gives them to us freely to enjoy. We owe our thanksgivings not to ourselves, but to Him. This language is echoed in our Declaration of Independence, in which Thomas Jefferson writes that men "are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Whether most people realize it or not, the key phrase in this declaration is "by their Creator." Jefferson didn't just toss that in to win bonus points with the religious set. Instead, it's the key to his argument. Here's how the argument works. In the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson is asserting the right of the colonies to declare independence on the basis of these "unalienable", or as we say nowadays, "inalienable", rights. If these rights are truly inalienable, they can't be based on what the English government, or indeed on what any other government, has granted, because what a government can grant, a government can take away. King George III, if indeed he is the source of rights, can say to the colonists, "Sorry; you don't have those rights anymore. I've decided you shouldn't have them."

The only way to make the rights inalienable, so that the colonists could assert them against the king, was to go over the king's head. Jefferson in effect said, "God gave us these rights, so you, King George, don't have the right to take them away." Logically speaking, the only way we can establish that inalienable rights exist is by reference to God.

I've always wondered why totalitarian regimes, from Nazi Germany through the Soviet Union to today's China, are always hostile to Christianity. I think this is the reason right here. If God is a higher power than the state, then His mere existence must place a check on the state's power. On the other hand, once God disappears from the picture, then the state reigns supreme, and no one's rights are safe. If our liberties depend on no higher power than the state, then the state also has the right to take them away. This danger exists even in a godless democracy. Remember, Hitler didn't rise to power through a military coup or anything like that. After the president of Germany died, the German people confirmed Hitler as the new president with 84.6% of the vote. As the saying goes, history doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme. The past tells us that if our country forsakes God, sooner or later we will elect a Hitler, not in the sense of election-year hyperbole, but in the sense of someone who will murder millions of innocent people. Anyone who thinks it can't happen here needs to take a look at what has already happened here to the rights of millions of unborn children. All that a greater disaster needs in order to happen is the right demagogue filling the vacuum left by the absence of God.

Effects on Human Existence

Indeed, without God, the notion of **RIGHT AND WRONG** itself will fall apart. We learn what the origin of the concept of good and evil is in Micah 6:8. We come to know both through the revelation of God. We can logically consider lying and perhaps figure out for ourselves why it's wrong to lie, but in the final analysis, lying is always wrong because God has said it is always wrong. If there is no God, then the categories of "always right" and "always wrong" cease to exist. Instead, we land in the territory so aptly described in Judges 21:25. What was true then is no less true for us today. Once there is no heavenly King, whether in Israel or anywhere else, each man is indeed free to do what is right in his own eyes. Let me give you an example of the way this works. Perhaps we believe that it's usually wrong to lie, but if our wife asks us if that dress makes her look fat, and it does, and we don't want to hurt her feelings, then maybe in that situation lying's OK. There is no one to tell us that we shouldn't lie, because we are the highest arbiter of morality.

Of course, this doesn't end with unflattering dresses. Once mankind gets to decide on its own what's right and wrong, literally everything is on the table. I believe with all of my being that the Holocaust was wrong, but Hitler and millions of committed Nazis just as passionately believed that it was right, that it was the only way to free Germany from the taint of the Jewish nation. Who can decide between Hitler and me, if not God? Today, we clearly recognize that Hitler was evil, but I guarantee you that if the Nazis had won the war, he would be lionized in schoolrooms all over the world. He would be honored as one of the greatest heroes of human history. Are right and wrong decided by nothing more lofty than who wins the war, who has the bigger guns or the larger number of bullets? If we don't have God's word on our side, how can we ever draw lines in the sand and say, "This won't be tolerated"?

The bright side here is that questions of right and wrong won't matter much, because in a world without God, there is no such thing as **FREE WILL** either. The Bible is built on the notion that man has free will, as we see from the famous words of Joshua in Joshua 24:15. Every day, every one of us chooses whom we are going to serve. Animals don't do that. It's one of the unique array of gifts given to us by God. However, if we have not received that divine gift, we don't have free will any more than animals do. Instead, everything that we do is produced either by our genetic code or our environment. We may have the illusion of choice, but in reality, we are doing nothing more than acting out our

programming. People with good programming will survive to produce offspring who will perpetuate that programming; people with bad programming will fail to produce fit offspring and be weeded out. Our lives are reduced to Darwinism.

If this is true, it has earth-shattering implications for our notions of culpability and guilt. If there is no free will, no one is to blame for anything because no one can actually make an evil decision. It's not John Doe's fault that he cheated on his wife. He has bad genes or a bad upbringing, and they made the choice for him. If men become convinced that they are compelled to do evil, how much more evil there will be! Likewise, if there is no such thing as guilt, our criminal justice system makes no sense. How can we hold a man personally accountable for a crime if he is not, in fact, personally accountable? Why would we send him to prison for five years to become a changed man if he is incapable of change? Instead, the only rational way to deal with a man with flawed programming is to shoot him like a rabid dog before he does more damage. If there is no God, then the way we deal with lawbreakers is completely mistaken.

Without God, it also becomes impossible for us to find **MEANING** for our lives. Solomon captures this problem in Ecclesiastes 1:2-4. This is a bleak portrait of the earthly meaning of all of our lives, but it is an accurate one. Each one of us is the center of our own universe, but the universe will continue on just fine without any of us, and indeed without all of us. If the creation continues, every one of us will die, and every one of us will be replaced by someone who hasn't even been born yet. For a few generations, people will put flowers on our graves, but then we will be forgotten, just as we have forgotten our own great-great-grandparents. Nor can we hope for immortality through the things that we do. Most of us will never do anything globally significant, and even if we rise to some position of prominence now, sooner or later, we will be forgotten too. How many people know off the top of their heads who the king of England was in 1511, 600 years ago? I don't even know the answer, and I'm a history buff. Whoever he was, he was a big deal in 1511, but today, he's dirt, and nobody cares. Sooner or later, time will reduce the biggest monuments to rubble, the most beautiful works of art to ash, and the greatest pieces of literature to gibberish. We can try as hard as we want to, but in a world without God, everything that we do here will sooner or later become meaningless.

Finally, if there is no God, then there is no **HOPE** either. Paul says this as well as it can be said in 1 Corinthians 15:32. If there isn't a God, there isn't a resurrection from the dead either, and if there isn't a resurrection, whom are we kidding? There's no point to struggle, there's no point to sacrifice, there's no point to making the hard decision that's the right decision. Why do any of those things if we will never benefit from them? Why attempt to be good and righteous at all? Our only priority should be packing as much pleasure into our lives as possible, and only working as hard as we must to make that happen. Brethren, if that's all that mankind can aspire to, then I say that it would have been better for mankind never to have been. If the highest purpose for our lives is debauchery, that doesn't just make us animals. It makes us disgusting animals. If we spend our lives wallowing in such pursuits, oblivion must come as a relief.

Conclusion.

That's what the world looks like without God. It's not a very pretty picture, is it? And yet, this is the world that those around us are groping toward, whether they realize it or not, and we are the only people who can do anything about it. As far as I'm concerned, 2 Thessalonians 2 is one of the most difficult chapters in the entire Bible to interpret. However, as I was writing this, the thought struck me that this sermon might have some bearing on 2 Thessalonians 2:7. Our God is a God who restrains. When we listen to Him, He keeps us from destroying ourselves. When we proclaim Him to others, He carries out His restraining work in their lives through us, so that they too may be kept safe.

What, then, of the people whom God no longer restrains? What, then, of the nation where the voices of the righteous are silent? Many Christians think the answers to our country's woes can be found at the ballot box, but we can't make people believe in God by voting for the right candidate. Our calling is to be a voice for all that is good and holy, to be the leaven that leavens the lives of all who are around us. We bear the light of the gospel not for ourselves, nor even for those close to us, but for those whom we will never know, who will hear the truth tomorrow because we proclaimed it today. That's what's at stake every time we decide to seize the moment or to let it slip away, to preach Christ or to remain silent. We are making our contribution, either to a world that continues to honor God, or to one that has forgotten Him.