

Don't Be Stupid

Perhaps you've read somewhere, or maybe heard from someone you respect, that there is no God, and you've adopted that opinion as well. Or perhaps some terrible experience has occurred in your life that led you to suppose that God doesn't exist. Or perhaps you've adopted some religious belief (and lots of them are on offer nowadays) that avoids or replaces the God of the Bible. Well you'd be wise to re-think your view of God because no issue in life is more important.

God is transcendent, which means that He cannot be sensed. We cannot see, or hear, or feel Him. We cannot know Him the same way that we know other people. And it has to be that way because He's a non-material Person and because of His infinite, all-consuming glory. But just because we can't see Him or hear Him doesn't mean that He doesn't exist. Precisely because He cannot be sensed by us, He has revealed Himself to us in other ways, so that we can know that He is there and that we can relate to Him.

God has revealed Himself to us in the Bible. He caused it to be written so that we can know Him. Because God is good and holy, we can trust that He saw to it that the Scriptures accurately reveal God to us. But even better, God embedded in the Bible certain prophecies that miraculously later came true, so that we can know that the Bible really is His Word to us. The Bible, in other words, is self-authenticating. There are prophecies about certain cities of ancient times, for example, that all came true, and there are prophecies about a coming Messiah, and they also came true as is obvious to anyone reading the Bible.

God has also revealed Himself to us in the Person of Christ Jesus. One of the reasons Jesus purposely came from heaven was to reveal God to us in a way that the written word cannot do. And the resurrection of Christ from the dead powerfully and irrefutably shows that God certainly exists.

It is absolutely irrational to say that God does not exist. In fact, there's nothing more thoughtless, more foolish, than to think or believe that there is no God. We say it only because we don't *want* there to be a God. And that's a totally different matter. As a just Creator, God holds us accountable for our relationship to Him.

By the way, two things to clarify: First, what about evolution? It's a speculative narrative intended to serve as intellectual "cover" for not wanting there to be a God. No one knows – or *can* know – if it's true. It's just an excuse, not a reason. Second, God doesn't need you. Out of love He created you, and He lovingly wants to bless you with the eternal enjoyment of His infinite Being – which you should want to experience more than anything. But evil having entered the human race, what's been added is that now you *need* to know God because, through Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross, forgiveness of sin is on offer. The consequence of rejecting God now is horrible; it's the just banishment eternally from His infinitely holy presence because of a sinful nature and lifetime history of sinful behavior.

But now, suppose you already believe in God. And maybe you're even a Christian. The very same warning applies to you as well: Think carefully, *very* carefully about what it means to be a Christian, because the consequences couldn't be more serious.

Most believers in America are outrageously complacent in their belief. They're barely aware of the privileges and are fully indifferent to the responsibilities of being in relationship with the sovereign Ruler of the cosmos. Except for the 2 hours they're in church on Sunday mornings, they're dangerously close to being deists. A renowned theologian and thoughtful Bible scholar from England came to America and observed that Americans – including Christians! – live like Epicureans. Not very much separates deism from Epicureanism in contrast to biblical Christianity. A profound disconnect exists between the Apostolic teachings in the New Testament regarding Christianity and what goes for Christianity in America today.

Most pulpit ministry in America's Protestant churches is salvation-oriented. Its preaching/teaching focuses on conversion and the promise of forgiveness of sins, and ultimate residence in heaven and avoidance of hell. The response of belief in Christ crucified and raised from the dead is faithfully sought. And of course lots of information about the Bible surrounds the preached Gospel message. And most church-goers are delighted to hear from the pulpit that their sins are forgiven and they're going to be in heaven one day. That's the take-home message of the American church. But in the Epistle to the Hebrews, all that is "milk" that the author didn't even want to bother with. The "meat" that is the message of the Bible, the message of Hebrews, is missing today from church preaching and from Christians' lives. It's overwhelmingly the main point of the New Testament, yet it's absent from our religion. Are we stupid, or what?

The Epistle to the Hebrews may as well have been intentionally written to the church in America today, it's that relevant. Let's look at it.

Commentators and expositors differ in their understanding of much of Hebrews, but we needn't go into those controversies here. From Acts 15:15 and most of 2 Corinthians, it appears that the early church had a sect of Jews who understood Jesus to be their promised Messiah, and they believed in Him. But they rejected Paul's apostleship. They therefore also rejected Paul's Gospel message. As the decades wore on, and the unbelieving Jews became more hostile toward the believers, those Jewish believers thought it would be to their advantage to simply return to Pharisaic Judaism and Torah observance, whose ideas and rituals they never really abandoned. Paul couldn't write to them, for they refused to acknowledge his authority, so someone not Paul nor associated with Paul had to deal with them. (One possibility is Apollos, see Acts 18:24-28.) The Greek text suggests it may actually be a transcript of an address that was initially given orally.

The author's sustained argument is readily evident in the 5 comparisons he makes, that the New Covenant and Jesus, the mediator of the New Covenant, are superior to the old. So returning to or remaining in Old Testament Judaism is worse than foolishness, it's rebellion against what God in grace has done. The text does more than merely exhort those Jewish believers to adhere to Jesus, though it's easily missed because we tend to read it through the lens of our theological traditions. The text severely and repeatedly (5 times) warns those initial readers/hearers that they *must* go forward into God's will – or else. Remaining in what they should have abandoned would place them under judgment.

When the Israelites left Egypt at the Exodus, in rebellion they refused to go on in the power of God to take the Land that was promised to them. They wanted to go back to Egypt, forgetting or ignoring that in Egypt they were enslaved. Their God was not present with them in Egypt, but they didn't care. They knew what was in Egypt and were used to it, and they preferred Egypt to the uncertainty of what was future; they weren't trusting God to fulfill His promises. They were turning their back on God, who had just saved them.

The author of Hebrews sees these immature believers in the early church doing the very same thing that those ancestral Israelites did. And he was horrified. Those Jewish believers wouldn't identify with the despised and rejected One, they wouldn't press on in obedience to Him, they wouldn't serve Him, wouldn't trust God to fulfill the promised future, and they wouldn't trust God to bring them thru persecution. Because in this new era, with God manifest in the Person of Christ, those believers also were in danger of turning their back on the God who had saved them. As God severely punished that first generation of Israelites who belonged to Him and experienced the Exodus but refused to trust Him, the author warned, God could do the same to those early believers.

And believers today may be doing the same thing by wanting to remain comfortably in the culture from which they were called out. They want to remain where they were, refusing to press on to maturity, refusing to serve Christ as He commanded, refusing to accept the reproach of the despised and rejected One, etc. Refusing to go on to the perfection we're called to would be like discarding one's faith. It would be like turning one's back on the God who saved them. So those warning passages in Hebrews apply to us: Press on – or else.

Why is perfection and maturity so important? Because it anticipates proleptically the perfections we'll have in the future when we're glorified and in the Kingdom. That's the reason for Hebrews chapter 11. All those Old Testament heroes lived their lives in their time periods in anticipation of the faithfulness of the future Christ. Moreover, our perfections mirror the perfections of God, and that glorifies God. Immature, worldly believers embarrass God, they shame Him; they reflect a love for the old way of life that was evil, demonic, inimical to God's holiness. Willfully remaining immature, in love with our culture, tells God that the glories of His Being don't really matter to us, we prefer the old ways.

The author writes, "show diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure...imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised" (6:10-12), saying that it's *our* responsibility to press on. Passive belief is not biblical (as James chapter 2 argues). Regardless the cost or the sacrifice, we **MUST** mirror God's perfections and His doings, because of the unique, exalted relationship He's called us into. And when the author of Hebrews writes, "the blood of Christ...cleanses our consciences from acts that lead to death *so that* we may serve the living God" (9:14), he's saying that God has tasked us with a mission, expecting those who understand the Gospel to carry it out. It's why we are saved. As the Son came to Earth to serve God, so we must serve Him.

The climactic verse in Hebrews, “We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus...Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith...let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess...and let us spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (10:19-24) is there for us. We have the incredibly wonderful offer of communing *now* in God’s presence by the Spirit thru prayer and meditation on the Word, the incomparable privilege of serving the sovereign, living God according to His holy will, and of receiving in the future infinitely great blessings as reward for faithfulness. So to be content with living our lives as everybody else around us does is, as we’ve always lived it before...hey, what else to call it but stupidity.

We’re dwelling in a nation that seems to be committed to stupidity, there’s so much of it everywhere. Our young people mindlessly spend hours each day playing video games or trying vainly to experience the trivialities of each others’ lives on what is (falsely) called “social” media. Mobs march in the streets mindlessly chanting slogans they don’t understand. Half the nation hates our President without knowing exactly why but it’s what their peers tell them to do, so they thoughtlessly do it. Parents mindlessly spend upwards of \$50,000 each year to send their kids to college to be indoctrinated with humanist and/or Marxist propaganda. Black people, without thinking it through, adopt a victim identity their leaders and liberal media tell them they must hold, and about one fourth of our nation’s white population thoughtlessly believes it too. Our intellectual elites tell us we must eschew God’s blessing of civilization because it came tainted with human sin; the plenitude of their minds is filled with a fantasy, and they want all of us to indulge that fantasy too. Although weather can barely be accurately predicted two days’ hence, scientists tell us without the slightest hesitation what our climate will be 100 years hence and, with consummate audacity, scientists claim to know exactly what happened billions of miles out in space billions of years ago. And we uncritically accept all this deluded thinking! Our nation’s one obsession – if we dare to identify one – is entertainment. We’re amusing ourselves to death, as Neil Postman presciently observed two decades ago. Want more examples of American stupidity? Just read the morning newspaper or watch the evening TV news.

What explains all this madness has to be more than simply that we’re an effete society, though that indeed may be true. Perhaps Satan is doing to America what he did millennia ago to Job, depriving us of God’s blessings to see if we’ll curse God, thus incurring God’s anger. More likely, God has removed His unique blessings from our land, allowing our latent, suppressed paganism to become overt, which He’ll then judge with deserved wrath. Americans have, after all, murdered almost 50 million pre-born babies over the past 4 decades! Did we suppose God wasn’t watching?

Moral darkness is enveloping our land, but people can’t see it, their minds are so empty. The menorah (“lampstand”) has been removed from the American church, but church leaders and church-goers don’t even miss it – probably because they never thought about what it was or knew that it was there. Most astonishing of all (actually it’s appalling), is that American church-goers, although they have unlimited access to their Bibles, are glibly content to know nothing of God’s will for them, so certain they are of future eternal bliss.

So my plea to readers is this: Open your minds! God gave us the gift of rational thinking so that we can reason things out, so that we can know truth. We dare not live as if God isn’t there, or as if He hasn’t spoken. We dare not live as we please, but to please Him who created us. As humans we have the Spirit-given ability to live our lives on the basis of biblical truths and commands. If the world around is committed to stupidity, that doesn’t mean we have to express it also. God gave us His revelation, the Bible, so that we can live it to His glory, expressing His perfections and carrying out His will. So, let’s do it.