

# Origins of Unbelief

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## Introduction

In Isa 53.3, we have a very familiar messianic text foretelling the rejection of the Christ when he would come eight centuries later:

He was despised, and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and as one from whom men hide their face he was despised and we esteemed him not.

We can know this is a messianic prophecy because it's quoted several times in the New Testament. For example, in Ac. 8.31ff, Philip the evangelist encountered the Ethiopian eunuch, a Jew, as he was reading this very passage in vv32-33:

32 Now the passage of the Scripture which he was reading was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before his shearer is dumb, So he openeth not his mouth: 33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: His generation who shall declare? For his life is taken from the earth.

In verse 35, Philip began from that scripture and preached unto him Jesus. Unless Philip was misusing the passage, Isaiah foretold the rejection of Christ by the Jews. In Lk. 18.31-33, we see Jesus telling his apostles he would fulfill all such prophecies concerning himself:

31 And he took unto him the twelve, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all the things that are written through the prophets shall be accomplished unto the Son of man. 32 For he shall be delivered up unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and shamefully treated, and spit upon: 33 and they shall scourge and kill him: and the third day he shall rise again.

Hence, the Old Testament prophesied the rejection and death of the messiah, and the New Testament showed its fulfillment, that Christ would not be esteemed by the Jews in general. This was only one of roughly 300 prophecies concerning the Christ, any one of which failing, Jesus would have been an impostor and not the anointed one of God.

In Jn. 15.20-22, we find the same thing to be true of Christ's apostles as Jesus foretold their rejection by those who heard their preaching:

20 Remember the word that I said unto you, A servant is not greater than his lord. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. 21 But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me. 22 If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no excuse for their sin.

Of course, they received the same treatment Jesus did because they were teaching the same things that Jesus taught.

The same is true with me, you, or any other faithful Christian teacher. As a matter of fact, any time our teaching is universal believed, we're no longer preaching the teaching of Christ and the apostles.

We raise the question: WHY? Why was Christ not esteemed? Why is he not esteemed in our time? Why are there so many unbelievers? Why are Christians viewed as having their heads in the

sand, or accused of being mentally deficient, as occurred recently on network television? Why are there not more believers? Why is Christ not esteemed? In the remainder of this essay, we wish to discuss the question of why Christ is not esteemed?

## **Terrible Acts in the Name of Christ by Non-Christians**

For centuries, unbelievers have blamed Christians for atrocities committed in the name of Christ by Roman Catholics during the crusades, the killing of thousands upon thousands of Muslims and other unbelievers because they wouldn't commit to conversion to "Christianity" by force.

Similarly, the French Inquisition received such blame for killing and persecuting Catholic heretics in their country.

We've seen much the same situation in Northern Ireland in recent years, because of the killing of protestants by Catholics and *vice versa*.

Such situations cause people to accuse Christianity of causing wars. This is not a small thing. People on call-in radio and make such comments. In debates on evidences, unbelievers accuse Christians of all these atrocities, and ridicule believers for such, saying that they could never be a Christian and be involved in such activity.

We should all realize that not everything credited to Christ is part of the religion he established. Jesus himself said in Mt. 7.21-23:

21 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? 23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Thus, many people claim to do things in Christ's name, yet it's pure assertion, for Christ never authorized their immoral behavior in his word.

Suppose during the next political campaign, I pick a candidate I prefer, and then kill his opponents, rob those collecting campaign funds for him, and harass those who won't vote for him. Would it be correct to object to my candidate because of my behaviour?

Obviously not, because I would be acting without the authority of the candidate himself.

In the same way, those acting in the name of Christ without his authority accomplish the same result: they cause unbelief in the name of Christ by such actions.

This explains why Paul said in Col. 3.17:

17 And whatsoever ye do, in word or in deed, (do) all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

To do something in the name of Christ doesn't mean to say his name while you do it, but to do only those things which Christ authorizes in his word, the New Testament. In II Jn. 9-11, John shows the flip side of the situation when he says:

9 Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. 10 If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into (your) house, and give him no greeting: 11 for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works.

John's concept of "going onward" is that of carelessly crossing a boundary, the boundary of Christ's teaching, and not being content to stay within it, being governed by it. When we're not content to stay within his teaching, John says we have not God, that is, God isn't dwell in us, we're not in fellowship with him, he's not involved in our disobedience.

Jesus stated this same truth another way in Jn. 14.23-24:

23 Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. 24 He that loveth me not keepeth not my words: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me.

So, the fellow that isn't content to be governed by the teaching of Christ doesn't have God, but the fellow who is has both the father and son dwelling him, that is, he's in fellowship with them both, and is assured of the love of both the father and son.

In Lk. 6.46-49, Jesus teaches further on this concept:

46 And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? 47 Every one that cometh unto me, and heareth my words, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like: 48 he is like a man building a house, who digged and went deep, and laid a foundation upon the rock: and when a flood arose, the stream brake against that house, and could not shake it: because it had been well builded. 49 But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that built a house upon the earth without a foundation; against which the stream brake, and straightway it fell in; and the ruin of that house was great.

Again, the person who remains in the teaching of Christ is a wise man building on a strong foundation, in addition to having both the father and son dwelling in him, he's also properly conducting himself as a servant of his Lord, instead of not doing what his lord says.

Last on this point, in Jn. 8.31, Jesus says:

Jesus therefore said to those Jews that had believed him, If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples;

This verse is a positive version of II Jn. 9, noticed above. A disciple of Christ abides in his word, the one who doesn't, doesn't even have God.

These passages should make us realize, that no matter how much zeal one might have, when he acts without the authority of Christ as his basis, he's disobeying a command of God, he's not in fellowship with God or Christ, he doesn't have God and Christ dwelling in him, he's not a true disciple of Christ, and he's causing unbelief in God and Christ.

This is one of the great reasons Christ is not esteemed—zealous men haven't followed the teaching of Christ—and his actions done in the name of Christ have given great occasion for unbelief. It behooves us to make sure that everything we say and do is in the name of Christ, that is, with his teaching as its basis.

## **Corruption in the Lives of the People of God**

Unbelievers seeing corruption in the lives of God's people is another great cause of unbelief. They point to Abraham, "the father of the faithful", and recite all those times he lied about his wife. They point to Peter in Gal. 2.11-13, where Paul says"

11 But when Cephas [Peter—SGD] came to Antioch, I resisted him to the face, because he stood condemned. 12 For before that certain came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came, he drew back and separated himself, fearing them that were of the circumcision. 13 And the rest of the Jews dissembled [acted hypocritically] likewise with him; insomuch that even Barnabas was carried away with their dissimulation.

Peter was a hypocrite, the Jews in Antioch who followed his lead were hypocrites, and even Barnabas, Paul's faithful traveling companion on his first missionary journey, was carried away with their hypocrisy himself. He had been aiding Paul in carrying the gospel to the Gentiles, and yet because of Peter's influence, he acted like he didn't have anything to do with the Gentiles!

One of the all-time great people of God whose corruption produced tremendous unbelief is David, God's king who lusted after Bathsheba in II Samuel 11.. Rather than controlling his eyes and lust, he committed adultery with her, then to cover up his sin, he murdered her husband, and yet he's set forth as "a man after God's own heart." Unbelievers point to David's corruption and say, "One of the great heroes of the Bible did all of this?"

Yes, it's sadly true, but in II Samuel 12, God sent Nathan to correct David, and when David repented of his sin, he said (II Sam. 12.13-14):

13 Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has taken away your sin; you shall not die. 14 However, because **by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme**, the child also that is born to you shall surely die."

History has certainly proven Nathan's statement, "...by this deed you have given occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme," to be correct. There's scarcely any time you discuss the Bible with an atheist, anywhere, anytime, that the case of David isn't brought up, yet II Sam. 2.9 Nathan said that David "despised the word of the Lord by doing evil in his sight." The Bible certainly doesn't uphold David's corruption.

Should unbelievers reject the teaching of God and Christ because of such corruption in the life of one of the great heroes of the Bible? Unless God and Christ upheld David's corrupt behavior, of course not, and they did not.

Suppose that some acquaintance of yours works for The Boeing Company, manufacturer of airliners, and that he's caught doing some filthy, ungodly thing. Should I say, "Boy, I'm never going to have anything to do with The Boeing Company. I'll never fly on one of their planes again, and I'm going to sell all my Boeing stock!?" Absolutely if he was acting as an agent of Boeing, but unless your friend was acting on Boeing's instructions and as their agent, Boeing doesn't deserve any condemnation for his corruption. If he was breaking company policy and the company censures him, the company has no fault.

And David's corruption wasn't God's fault in the case of Bathsheba and her husband, either, yet David's sin still gives the enemies of God great occasion to blaspheme him, doesn't it?

Some wise person said, "More people read Christians than read the Bible." Realizing that, those of claiming to be Christians should take great care to act appropriately on our jobs, for unbelievers around us have ideas about what is right and wrong. Christians, more than anyone else, can give great occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme.

Just like those who claim to be my friends can do me a lot more harm than strangers can, those claiming to be the friends of God and Christ can do them the most harm. Realizing this should make us be very careful, as Peter wrote to Jewish Christians in I Pet. 2.11-12:

11 Beloved, I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims, to abstain from fleshly lust, which war against the soul; 12 having your behavior seemly among the Gentiles; that, wherein they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works, which they behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

In vv 13-15, Peter gives a particular application of seemingly behavior among unbelievers:

13 Be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether to the king, as supreme; 14 or unto governors, as sent by him for vengeance on evil-doers and for praise to them that do well. 15 For so is the will of God, that by well-doing ye should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men

## **Failure to Realize the Moral Bankruptcy of Atheism**

In the chapter "If There's No God, There's No Such Thing as Right and Wrong," we addressed this subject, and it certainly applies in this chapter on the origins of unbelief. Again, if there's no God, there is absolutely no basis for a system of ethics. In a debate I had with a humanities professor, Dr. Paul Briens, I asked him if he had any moral or ethical precept that would prevent me from killing him, after all, we are just animals, and that's the law of the jungle. He responded that he did not. Ethically, atheism cannot offer a thing, and he proved it. Some humanity, eh? In a Washington State University *Evergreen*, he also said:

Most Christians vote to outlaw sexual freedom: public nudism, homosexuality, group marriage, cohabitation, erotic films and magazines... If fewer people held such beliefs, most of us would be better off.

Though a teaching professor, and faculty sponsor of the League for the Promotion of Militant Atheism at a small university, his position was certainly in line with atheists prominent on the national and international scene. Bertrand Russell, the prominent British atheist of the previous century, affirmed:

"Outside human desires there is no moral standard."  
(*What I Believe*, p. 37)

In his autobiography, Russell wrote:

"We feel that the man who brings widespread happiness at the expense of misery to himself is a



better man than the man who brings unhappiness to others and happiness to himself. I do not know of any rational ground for this view, or, perhaps, for the somewhat more rational view that whatever the majority desires is preferable to what the minority desires. These are truly ethical problems, but I do not know of any way in which they can be solved except by politics or war. All that I can find to say on this subject is that an ethical opinion can only be defended by an ethical axiom, but, if the axiom is not accepted, there is no way of reaching a rational conclusion." (Bertrand Russell, *Autobiography, III*, Simon & Schuster, 1969, p. 29, cited in *Thrust, III*, #3, Austin, TX: Southwest Church of Christ, Jerry Moffitt, Ed., p. 139.)

Evolutionist George G. Simpson affirmed the same thing:

"Discovery that the universe apart from man or before his coming lacks and lacked any purpose or plan has the inevitable corollary that the workings of the universe cannot provide any automatic, universal, eternal, or absolute ethical criteria or right and wrong." (George G. Simpson, *The Meaning of Evolution*, Mentor Books, 1951, p. 180, cited in *Thrust, III*, #3, Austin, TX: Southwest Church of Christ, Jerry Moffitt, Ed., p. 140.)

Will Durant, the American educator and writer, said:

"If life is a struggle for existence in which the fittest survive, then strength is the ultimate virtue, and weakness the only fault. Good is that which survives, which wins; bad is that which gives way and fails." **(Source?)**

In the chapter "If There's No God, There's No Such Thing As Right and Wrong," we saw that Hitler and his General Bernhardt took the "law of the jungle" Durant spoke of to its logical conclusion, to the sad demise of tens of millions under Naziism.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche affirmed:

"Man shall be trained for war, and woman for the recreation of the warrior: all else is folly." (Source: *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Tudor Pub., 1936, p. 65, quoted in *Evolution, Science Falsely So-Called*, p. 92)

Charles Smith, the former President of the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism, said:

"Women are in the majority in the churches. In the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism, we have almost ten men to one woman. I will not say what the implications are, but man's brain is considerably larger than woman's." (*Oliphant-Smith Debate* **more?**)

Friederich Engels, 19<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher, claimed that morality has always been:

"...a class morality: it has either justified the domination and the interests of the ruling class, or, as soon as the oppressed class has become powerful enough, it has represented the revolt against this domination and the future interests of the oppressed." (*Anti-Duhring*, p. 109 **more?**)

Nicolai (a pseudonym of Vladimir) Lenin, agreed with the thrust of this section of this essay:

"We say that our morality is entirely subordinated to the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat. Our morality is derived from the interests of the class struggle of the proletariat." (*The Tasks of the Youth Leagues*, pp. 19-21, Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953)

Twentieth century French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre explained his similar view as follows:

"Everything is indeed permitted if God does not exist, and man is in consequence forlorn, for he cannot find anything to depend upon either within or outside himself. . . Nor, on the other hand, if God does not exist, are we provided with any values or

commands that could legitimize our behavior. ((Jean Paul Sartre, "Existentialism and Humanism," in *French Philosophers from Descarte to Sartre*, Edited by Leonard M. Marsak, Meridian Books, 1961, p. 485, cited in *Thrust, III, #3*, Austin, TX: Southwest Church of Christ, Jerry Moffitt, Ed., p. 141.)

Sartre contended that whatever one chooses to do is right; value is attached to the choice itself so that

". . . we can never choose evil." (Jean Paul Sartre, "Existentialism," reprinted in *A Casebook on Existentialism*, Edited by William V. Spanos, Thomas Y. Crowell, 1966, p. 279., cited in *Thrust, III, #3*, Austin, TX: Southwest Church of Christ, Jerry Moffitt, Ed., p. 141.)

NOTE: The hypocrisy of this false dogma, of course, is revealed by the fact that the propagators of such ideas really mean that everything is permitted for them. They do not mean that the theft of their property, the rape of their wives, and the cutting of their throats is permitted!

Of course, it's not just the propagators of this doctrine aren't the only ones that don't live by it, but also most unbelievers do not, either. It's the failure to realize the power of this dogma that produces a great deal of unbelief in Christ and God.

## **Denominationalism – The Argument I Cannot Answer**

Several years ago I debated a professor in one of our state universities who was the faculty sponsor of a group called The League for the Promotion of Militant Atheism. This group challenged religious groups to debate the evidences for the existence of God and the inspiration of the Bible. A local group of Christians selected me to respond to the challenge. In preparation for the debate I read several interviews with this professor. One contained an argument against the existence of God and the inspiration of the Bible that is unanswerable. As a matter of fact, it is the strongest argument atheists and skeptics can use. It has produced more atheists than all the militant atheists put together!

## The Atheist's Unanswerable Argument Against the Way of Christ

This professor based his argument upon religious division. He said:

Common sense tells us that atheism is a much more rational stand in the face of the conflicting claims of the world's religions than fleeing to the Bible.

The fact that there are so many religions shows, at best, that human beings have a weakness for irrational beliefs.

## The Atheist Agrees with Jesus

This argument is unanswerable because it agrees exactly with what Jesus said about the harm of religious division! This militant atheist preached exactly like Christ on this subject. As a matter of fact, he preached more like Christ on this subject than many preachers do.

In Jn. 17.20-21, on the night before he died, Jesus prayed for all the believers in him who would come after him to believe the same thing. Thus, if we believe in Christ, this is Christ's prayer for us. Jesus began by praying in his own behalf, then in behalf of the apostles. Then he said:

Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word; *that they may all be one*; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us; that the world may believe that thou didst send me.

Paul, in I Cor. 1.10-11, taught much the same thing when he told the Corinthian Christians:

Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, *that ye all speak the same thing*, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the *same mind and in the same judgment*.

Likewise, Paul prayed in Rom. 15.5-6:

...that with *one accord* ye may with *one mouth* glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Then in Gal. 5.20, Paul said concerning religious division:

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousies, wraths, *factions, divisions*,...of which I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that they that practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

With these passages fresh in our minds, we must ask ourselves some questions, “Do all believers in denominations speak the same thing? Are there any divisions that are works of the flesh? Do all denominational believers speak with one mouth?”

The answer to all these questions is a dismal, “No!” Over 760 separate religious denominations exist in the United States alone, all claiming allegiance to Christ. But they all teach different things that contradict the others. Yet they all claim to teach their distinctive doctrines right out of the Bible.

This is why Jesus prayed that division among his followers would not occur, that the world might believe that he was the Christ. If Christ approved of religious division, the atheist’s argument against the way of Christ would be unanswerable.

## **The Greatest Enemy of True Religion Is Religion Itself**

We don’t have to look far to find examples of how modern denominations ignore Jesus’ prayer for unity.

### **Newsweek Magazine**

What do we imagine any intelligent person saw in this notice in *Newsweek Magazine* several years ago?

The Good Shepherd Baptist Church in Denver, Colo., has refused to meet the payments on a small stucco building it contracted to buy from the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 1965—precisely on the ground that the property already

belongs to God. The Baptists say “the Holy Spirit revealed to them that once you buy a church property, it belongs to the Lord and nobody can sell it.” The Lutherans say, “But the Holy Spirit did not speak to us in this way. The Baptists got it from a special revelation and there is no way to deal with that.” (*“Divine Property?” Newsweek* [July 5, 1971], p. 51.)

What did the several million people who read this in *Newsweek* think of the concept that the Holy Spirit taught these two denominations two different and contradictory doctrines? What do we think?

### **Martin Luther**

What happens when people realize that the great reformation leader Martin Luther wrote:

I ask that men make no reference to my name, and call themselves not Lutherans, but Christians. What is Luther? My doctrine, I am sure, is not mine, nor have I been crucified for any one. St. Paul, in I Cor. iii, would not allow Christians to call themselves Pauline or Petrine, but Christian. How then should I, poor, foul carcase that I am, come to have men give to the children of Christ a name derived from my worthless name? No, no, my dear friends; let us abolish all party names, and call ourselves Christians after Him Whose doctrine we have. (Hugh Thomson Kerr, *A Compend of Luther's Theology* [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943], p. 135, cited by Lewis W. Spitz, Ph.D., *Our Church and Others* [Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1969], pp. 23-24.)

Yet people who call themselves Lutherans blatantly disagree with Luther himself, who on this point agreed with Christ.

### **John Wesley**

Another great reformation leader, John Wesley, among whose followers are the Methodists, Wesleyans, etc. said:

Would to God that all party names, and unscriptural phrases and forms which have divided the Christian world, were forgot and that the very name [Methodist—SGD] might never be mentioned more, but be buried in eternal oblivion. (John Wesley, *Universal Knowledge, A Dictionary and Encyclopedia of Arts, Science, History, Biography, Law, Literature, Religions, Nations, Races, Customs, and Institutions, Vol. 9*, Edward A. Pace, Editor [New York: Universal Knowledge Foundation, 1927], p. 540.)

In violation of Wesley's plea, his followers still call themselves Methodists, Nazarenes, and Wesleyans.

### **Charles Spurgeon**

What transpires when people learn that Charles Spurgeon, one of the greatest Baptist preachers who ever lived, said:

I look forward with pleasure to the day when there will not be a Baptist living! I hope that the Baptist name will soon perish, but let Christ's name last forever. (*Spurgeon Memorial Library, Vol. I*, n.d., p. 168.)

Instead of Spurgeon's desire coming true, we have at least twenty-six different Baptist denominations in this nation alone. Likewise, Calvinists today disagree with Calvin, etc.

## **Preachers Teach Contradictory Doctrines**

Many people seem to have no problem with all the contradictory doctrines in the religious realm, and yet if a single preacher taught all those contradictory doctrines himself, all would realize he had serious mental problems. Imagine what happens when an intelligent person sees so-called Christians claiming that the Bible can be understood hundreds of different ways, and the amazing thing about it, each way is right if religious division is right!

In truth, denominationalism produces more atheism than all the atheists, militant atheists, hypocrites, and false teachers put together. Jesus knew it, Paul knew it, most of the founders of these denominations knew it, and pleaded that it wouldn't happen.

## **Fruits of Denominationalism**

With respect to religious division, compare the teaching of Jesus Christ with the statements of many prominent atheists:

### **Jesus**

...that they may all be one...that the world may believe. (Jn. 17.20-21)

### **Benedict Spinoza**

This prominent Dutch Philosopher blamed theological creeds with all their contradictions as his rationale for becoming an atheist.

### **Voltaire**

This famous French philosopher blamed the contradictions and abuses of Roman Catholicism for his atheism.

### **David Hume**

This foremost Scottish philosopher blamed the creeds of Calvin and Presbyterianism for his unbelief.

### **Diderot**

The eminent French encyclopedist blamed the creeds of orthodoxy for his atheism.

### **Robert Owen**

Robert Owen was the greatest European atheist of the 19th century. He was a genius and a philanthropist, and concerning his background before debating Alexander Campbell on the evidences for the existence of God, historian Bill J. Humble said:

At the time when Robert Owen came to debate Campbell in 1829, he was 58 years of age and already a world figure of renown, appealing to the popular imagination by his schemes for the betterment of humanity, and arousing the ire of united clergy by his denunciations of all religions. This international figure was born in New Montgomeryshire, North Wales, on May 14, 1771.



At an early age the boy was enrolled in a day school where he evidenced a precocious mental development; for at seven he had mastered all the information which his instructor could impart and was himself teaching. The intellectual growth of the young man was so rapid that before attaining his tenth birthday, he had investigated a number of theological works and examined their contents so critically as to lead himself to doubt the fundamental nature of all religion. (Bill J. Humble, *Alexander Campbell and Controversy* [Rosemead, CA: Old Paths Book Club, 1952], p. 81.)

The Bible didn't produce this distinguished atheist. The contradictions in denominational creeds did!

### **Charles Darwin**

Many do not realize that the renowned agnostic Charles Darwin at one time studied at a seminary to become a clergyman in the Church of England. How did Charles Darwin, a believer in Christ and a creationist, become an agnostic whose name is inevitably connected with the hypothesis of evolution? What swayed the man who has swayed so many? Why did Darwin, who prepared for the work of a clergyman, become the chief apostle of evolution?

His son, also his biographer, wrote:

We had an earnest conversation about going into Holy Orders; and I remember his asking me, with reference to the question put by the Bishop in the ordination service, "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Spirit, etc.?" whether I could answer in the affirmative, and on my saying I could not, he said, "Neither can I, and therefore I cannot take Orders." (Francis Darwin, *Life and Letters of Charles Darwin, Vol. I* [New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1898], p. 147.)

Darwin didn't reject Christ, or the Bible. He rejected a doctrine that was not even in the Bible, something in the creed book of the Church of England! Darwin's works influenced the minds of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, and Hitler, and gave them the "ethical basis"

for many of their horrible actions. Who would dare say religious division isn't really so bad?

### **Robert Ingersoll**

The greatest American atheist of the last third of the nineteenth century claimed that theological creeds led to his religious downfall.

### **Charles Smith**

Charles Smith, the first president of the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism, explained how he became an atheist:

Let me tell you something of how I came to be an Atheist. I used to live in Maud, Oklahoma—was there before the town was built; and have lived in Shawnee. I was in this town some twenty years ago, working for the Farmer's Union. I joined the First Methodist church. A few years later, I went to a Methodist school, Epworth University, in Oklahoma City...The next session I went to the State University at Norman. I tried to continue to believe the Christian religion, but began to investigate its doctrines. One day when watching a football game with my pastor, I asked him if he believed the virgin birth story, and the Adam and Eve story. He said, "Why, of course not." I demanded: "Why do you not tell your congregation that?" He replied: "That would do a great deal of harm, and no good." (Charles Smith, *Oliphant-Smith Debate* [Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1952], pp. 23-24.)

In every case, these renowned atheists and skeptics became unbelievers, not because of the Bible and the teaching of Christ or his apostles, but because they rightly couldn't conceive that such religious confusion came from God. People's allegiance to human creeds produced their unbelief.

This is why Jesus prayed that his followers would not be divided. This is the reason we ought to avoid man-made religion: names, doctrines, institutions, organizations, and practices that come from man, not God. This is why Jesus said, in Mt. 15.6-9:

...And ye have made void the word of God because of your tradition...This people honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men.

## Creeds Produce Denominationalism

Many times people think denominationalism is produced by an inability of mankind to agree on how the Bible ought to be interpreted. Rather, it is produced by allegiance to something other than God and Christ: allegiance to human creeds. *Webster's New World Dictionary*, says concerning the term "creed":

(...Latin, *credo*, lit., I believe...) 1. a brief statement of religious belief; confession of faith; 2. a specific statement of this kind accepted as authoritative by a church; 3. a statement of belief, principles, or opinions on any subject. (*Webster's New World Dictionary*, Second College Edition [New York: The World Publishing Company, 1970].)

It is important to realize the distinction between a personal creed and an organizational one. I have the right to state what I believe, and other men may state their beliefs as well. However, denominational creeds are not statements of personal belief, but statements of what someone says *individuals must believe* to be in fellowship with them. It follows from this that a denominational creed must be a condition of communion in a specific coalition of congregations. This concept did not exist among New Testament Christians.

Thus, *The Philadelphia Confession of Faith* (Presbyterian), *The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*, *The Methodist Discipline*, etc. are not personal statements of belief, but authoritative (that is, based upon human authority) standards of fellowship other than the Bible. When one is involved in denominationalism, he is subject to human authority rather than divine authority.

For example, the *Discipline of the Free Methodist Church* prescribes allegiance to it as a condition of fellowship in that denomination:

Let none be received into full connection unless they give evidence of a renewed heart, by living up to the requirements of the General Rules, ... (6) Do you subscribe to our articles of religion, our General Rules, and our Discipline, and are you willing to be governed by the same? (*Discipline of the Free Methodist Church* [North Chili, NY: B. T. Roberts, Publisher, 1887], p. 24.)

Be assured, none of Christ's apostles or other early Christians, nor any Christians for eighteen hundred years after Christ subscribed to the requirements of the General Rules of the Free Methodist Church. They never heard of the rules, or the denomination! These simply did not exist in New Testament times.

Similarly, one must hold to the creeds of the Lutheran church to be in that denomination. In *Our Church and Others*, published by the Evangelical Lutheran denomination, we read:

The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the total of all who unreservedly accept all canonical books of the Old and New Testament as God's revealed Word and who confess agreement with the teaching again brought to light through Luther's reformation and presented concisely in writing to Emperor and Empire at Augsburg in 1530 and repeated and expanded in the other so-called Lutheran symbols.

If someone asks a Lutheran: "What does the Lutheran Church teach?" or: "What do you as a Lutheran believe?" he can direct the inquirer to the Lutheran confessions.

The Lutheran confessions may also be regarded as a standard around which Lutherans rally in their common defense of the doctrines of the Scriptures against error, or they may be regarded as a flag to which the teachers of the church pledge loyalty. Every member of the Lutheran Church is expected to subscribe not only to the Bible but also to the confessions as a correct presentation of Biblical doctrines...

Therefore pastors and professors are asked at the time of their ordination or installation: “Dost thou accept the three Ecumenical Creeds—the Apostles’, the Nicene, and the Athanasian—as faithful testimonies to the truth of the Holy Scriptures, and dost thou reject all the errors which they condemn?” and: “Dost thou believe that the Unaltered Augsburg Confession is a true exposition of the Word of God and a correct exhibition of the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church; and that the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, the two Catechisms of Martin Luther, the Smalcald Articles, and the Formula of Concord as contained in the Book of Concord—are also in agreement with this one Scriptural faith?” *To both of these questions the candidate must answer, “I do.”* The officiating minister then asks: “Dost thou solemnly promise that thou wilt perform the duties of thy office in accordance with these Confessions and that *all thy teaching* and thy administration of the Sacraments *shall be in conformity* with the Holy Scriptures and *with the afore-mentioned Confessions?*” (Lewis W. Spitz, Ph.D., *Our Church and Others* [St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1969], pp. 23-26.)

In addition, one who holds to the Bible and *The Methodist Discipline* will become a Methodist, not a Baptist. To be a Baptist, one must hold to the *Baptist Manual* plus the Bible. However, we cannot follow that course and become a Mormon. Mormons are those who hold to both the Bible and the *Book of Mormon*.

One last illustration that shows denominationalism is not produced by difficulties of interpretation but by adherence to denominational creeds is found in the following statement from Edward T. Hiscox’s *Standard Manual for Baptist Churches*:

It is most likely that in the Apostolic age when there was but “One Lord, one faith, and one baptism,” and no differing denominations existed, the baptism of a convert by that very act, constituted him a member of the church, and at once endowed him with all the rights and privileges of full membership. In that

sense, “baptism was the door into the church.” Now, it is different; and while the churches are desirous of receiving members, they are wary and cautious that they do not receive unworthy persons. The churches therefore have candidates come before them, make their statement, give their “experience,” and then their reception is decided by a vote of the members. (Edward T. Hiscox, D. D., *The Standard Manual for Baptist Churches* [Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1890], p. 22.)

It’s an absolute impossibility to follow just the Bible and become involved in these denominations or any others. None of them existed in Bible times.

## **The Harm of Denominational Creeds**

We’ve all been around denominational creeds all our lives. Are they as innocuous as many think?

### **Creeds Hinder Fellowship**

One of the arguments for the existence of creeds is that they are necessary for unity. While they produce unity *within the denomination*, on a scale larger than the denomination, they produce exactly the opposite. *Creeds are walls that prevent the fellowship of believers in Christ* in different denominations, in the sense that fellowship is contemplated in the Bible.

### **Creeds Impeach the Wisdom of God**

Will the Bible as God gave it produce the unity God desires? If it won’t, we imply that men must write creeds because God didn’t know what to say.

### **Creeds Impugn the Good Will of Christ**

If Christ were wise enough to give us everything we needed (which he promised to do in Jn. 14.26, 16.13, and that the apostles affirmed he did, II Tim. 3.16; II Pet. 1.3; Jude 3), but he didn’t, then if God’s wisdom is not impeached, Christ’s goodness must be. Did Christ deliberately reveal the Bible in such an ambiguous fashion

that it remained for men to write creeds to make God's meaning understandable?

### **Creeds Harm Believers in Christ**

Creeds not only harm the reputation of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, who brought the complete revelation into the world, but they *cause inestimable harm to believers in Christ*. Rather than obey Paul's command to test everything to see if it's genuine (I Thes. 5.21), and "prove what is well pleasing to the Lord" (Eph. 5.8-11), if we place our confidence in creeds, we are obliged to approach the Bible with an interpretation already placed upon it. Obeying the apostle's teaching requires us to examine the scriptures with no established opinion. If we place our confidence in creeds, we are not so free to examine the scriptures for ourselves. We are compelled to conduct our investigations in light of the creed. Thus, creeds are opposed to independent Bible study and those of us who would profit thereby. Human creeds simply did not exist in the time of Christ, his apostles, or early-day Christians.

The atheist's argument from religious division is still unanswerable. When we understand the great harm of religious division, we cannot be benevolent toward denominationalism and maintain our allegiance to Christ.

## **Conclusion**

Once we contemplate the harm of religious division in our time, we can appreciate why Jesus and his apostles were so opposed to it. If you have a denominational background, you can't continue to be involved with such and 1) respect Jesus' prayer, 2) respect Paul's prayer, 3) not be involved in a work of the flesh, and give atheists an unanswerable argument to be an unbeliever..