***“Contend for the faith…” vs.* Doing Without God**

Is. 40:30-31; [Psalms 127:1-2](https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/scripture/sermons-on-psalms-1271-2/?keyword=Psalms+127%3A1-2&ref=SermonPrint); [[Eph. 2:11-12](https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/scripture/sermons-on-ephesians-212/?keyword=Ephesians+2%3A12&ref=SermonPrint); John 15:1-8](https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/scripture/sermons-on-john-155/?keyword=John+15%3A5&ref=SermonPrint) March 18, 2018

**Summary: God tells us that those who are outside of Christ are "without God". What does that mean to those outside of Christ and what does that mean for us INside of Christ?**

INTRO: Back in 1959, Charleston Heston starred in a movie that is still considered one of the greatest movies of all time --- Ben Hur. It was a Biblical epic that is still known for its climatic chariot race where Heston (the hero of the film) was intent on destroying his hated enemy.

 Just for that one race scene, 5 weeks of filming was required along with 15,000 extras and 18 chariots. In the spirit of authenticity, Heston spent weeks learning to drive the chariot but he was still worried about the race.

 Heston told the stunt coordinator “I can drive the chariot, but I’m not sure I can win.”

 The Stunt director smiled and said “Chuck, you just make sure you stay in the chariot. I’ll make sure you win the race.”

 Now think about that: Heston was GOING to win that race. It was in the script. There was no way he was going to lose. And yet, for weeks Heston fretted over whether or not he could win the race. Why would he do that? He did that because he forgot that the outcome didn’t depend on him - it depended on the director of the movie. If the director decided Heston was going to win the race, he was going to win the race.

APPLY: Now the Bible tells us that the same thing is true for US in Christ. If God decides we’re gonna win the race – we’re gonna win the race, and that is because **we have a God who actively involves Himself in our lives**. But that’s not true for anyone else. **Ephesians 2:12** tells us that before we became Christians we were *“without God in the world.”*

 This is the **last in our series of sermons** about “contending for the faith once delivered to the saints”, and the focus of this sermon is on the fact that part of that faith we’re contending for is the fact that we HAVE a God and the rest of the world does not.

 **The rest of the world is without God.** **But what does that mean?** Well, Psalm 127 tells us what that means: “*Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for He gives to his beloved sleep.”* **Psalm 127:1-2**

 In other words, if God is not part of a person’s life – they can build the finest houses and hire the best watchmen to guard their valuables, but it will all be in vain. They’ll stay up nights, losing sleep, because they have no God who can protect them.

 Now, Jesus takes it one step further: "*I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me YOU CAN DO NOTHING.”* **John 15:5**

 **The Bible maintains that without God, you can’t do anything**. Now this morning, we’re going to examine what that means and why God tells us that. In order to do that, we’re going to look at **two kinds of people who try to live their lives without God.**

 The **1st kind of person** who tries to live without God is the most obvious: the **militant atheist.**

ILLUS: There’s a story about a man who was a very militant atheist but he sent his son to a school called “Trinity School” because, despite its Christian roots, was a great school. After a month, the boy comes home and casually says, “Dad, do you know what Trinity means? It means the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

 The father can barely control his rage. He seizes his son by the shoulders and declares, "Now son, I'm going to tell you something now and I don’t want you ever forget it. There is only one God and we don't believe in Him!"

ILLUS: Dan Brown, the author of the DaVinci Code was at a Book Fair in Germany where he promoted his new book “Origin” released last October by Doubleday. (You don’t need to rush out and buy it.) He said his book was inspired by the question “Will God Survive Science?” His answer was obviously “NO”.

 One of the characters in the book says “The age of religion is drawing to a close and the age of science is dawning.”

 And at the book fair Dan Brown said “Humanity no longer needs God but may - with the help of artificial intelligence - develop a new form of collective consciousness that fulfils the role of religion”

 What’s he saying? He’s saying we don’t NEED God in our lives. We’ll eventually get to the point where God is replaced by our superior wisdom and knowledge.

 Other atheists are more to the point: Daniel Radcliffe (actor for Harry Potter): “I’m not religious. I’m an atheist and a militant atheist when religion starts impacting legislation.”

 More recently, Bill Maher slammed religion as a “neurological disorder” that justifies “crazies” and prevents people from thinking logically.

 I could go on and on with quotes from atheists who are not satisfied with just hating God, they want to enlist followers who will hate God along with them.

 Men like Dan Brown and these others, are one of the main reasons that God calls us and tells us that we need **to contend for the faith** once delivered to the saints.

 Jude says it this way: *“Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”* **Jude 1:3-4**

 In essence we need to contend for our faith because there are people out there who hate God so much that they’ll try to shout down your faith, and they’ll do whatever they can to undermine the faith of Christians by ridiculing and mocking Christ.

 Now, as we’ve said in every sermon in this series: We don’t have to APOLOGIZE for our faith. We don’t need to rally to God’s defense. Our God is bigger than we are and He doesn’t really need for us to defend Him. But God still calls for us to contend for our faith. He calls us to stand up boldly and declare what we believe in, and to stand firm against false teaching and false teachers.

 **Now by contending for the faith once delivered to the saints, you MIGHT just convert one of these men who hate God so much.** But we need to realize, our major purpose is more likely to give courage and encouragement to those whose faith might be endangered by these evil men.

 But, returning to our point: **what does it mean to be unable to do anything without God.** Bertrand Russell was a man who had no faith in the Bible or God. He describes in eloquent terms the natural outcome of a life from which all faith in the resurrection of Christ is removed. He says:

 “The life of man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, towards a goal that few can hope to reach and where none can tarry long. One by one, as they march, our comrades vanish from our sight, seized by the silent orders of omnipotent death. Brief and powerless is man's life, on his and all his race the slow, sure doom falls, pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way. For man, condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gates of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day.” (A Freeman’s Worship)

 Now, isn’t that cheerful? What a pathetic dismal take on life!

 But it does point to one of the major problems with those who live their lives without God.

ILLUS: **Dennis Prager** (a nationally syndicated talk-show host) points out a few other problems with living without God. (I tinkered with his terminology and listed only a few of his points – the full list in his language is at the end of the sermon in an appendix). **“LIFE WITHOUT GOD"**

**1. Without God, there is no good and evil.** This does not mean that an atheist cannot be a good person. Nor does it mean that all those who believe in God are good. It simply means that unless there is a moral authority that is above us and sets the standard of what is "right" and "wrong", if there is no such higher authority, morality ends up being determined by majority vote and what people “feel.”

**2. Without God, there is no objective meaning to life.** Without a creator, we are simply the random result of a mindless evolution. We are an accident of nature and our existence has no more intrinsic value than slime in a pond.

**3. Life is ultimately a tragic fate, if there is no God.** We live, we suffer, we die – some horribly, many prematurely – but our end (without God) offers nothing more than empty oblivion.

**4. If there is no God, there is no judgment.** The kindest and most innocent victims of torture and murder suffer the same fate AFTER death as the most cruel torturers and mass murderers.

**5. "Without God," Dostoevsky famously wrote, "all is permitted."** There has been plenty of evil committed by believers in God, but the widespread cruelties and sheer number of innocents murdered by secular regimes – specifically Nazi, Fascist, Islamic and Communist regimes – dwarfs the evil done in the name of religion.

 **The Point Is:** **a world without God is a world of despair and hopelessness. Without God, this world is destined to be filled with evil and death.**

 Now atheists are people you’d expect to live without God. They hate him and want nothing to do with Him.

 But there’s **another kind of person who believes they can do without God**, and these are people you’d never expect to try to do without God - because these are the kind of people who are church members, at least in name.

Hebrews 11 describes what they look like: “… *without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.”* **Hebrews 11:6**

 Did you catch that? There are folks out there who believe God EXISTS…they just don’t act like it. They live their lives “religiously” but don’t look to God as one who rewards those who seek Him. They literally live without God while being surrounded by constant reminders of His existence.

 These folks may have entire Bible verses memorized, and hymn verses, and they may even be able to do things you and I can’t - but God is not really IN their lives. I happen to know some folks like that.

 In Matthew 7 Jesus said “*Many will say to me on that day (of judgment), ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!*’ **Matthew 7:22-23**

 He never KNEW them? But wait a minute - they’re doing all this cool stuff IN JESUS NAME!!! How could Jesus NOT know them!??

 Well, here’s what’s happening. They did all that they did IN Jesus name… but Jesus wasn’t IN what they were doing. Their faith was empty repetition of religiosity and even cool religious activity.

ILLUS: They’re kind of the kids of yesteryear who collected Sunday School pins. A lot of the kids went to Sunday School simply to get the pins… not to get a deeper knowledge of God and what He could do for them. Now, the church leaders rightly thought that if they could just expose the kids to Scripture, they’d pick stuff up by osmosis much of the time. But the attendance pins often became a goal in and of themselves.

 In the same way, there are many church members who are just going thru the motions. I call this kind of church member a “Cotton Candy” believer.

 You know what cotton candy is don’t you? Do you know what’s in it? It’s nothing more than sugar and air. Once you bit into it, it’s like it disappears. There’s literally nothing there! It’s all just empty calories.

 That’s what cotton candy faith is like: It looks good, it tastes good… but once God takes a bite, there’s nothing there

 Now… how did they get that way? How did Cotton Candy kind of believers get to the point that they’re just empty calories? Well, they never learned to cling to God. Their faith NEVER really NEEDED God because they got to thinking they could handle things quite fine on their own …thank you very much.

 Now I’m not pointing a finger at anybody here, and here’s why. You folks are faithful. Whereas the national average of church attendance is something between 20 to 25%, our attendance rate is something like 75%. That tells me you are engaged, that you enjoy hearing God’s Word and worshipping Jesus.

 You see, it’s being connected to Jesus that makes the difference. Jesus said that when He told us*: “I am the vine; you are the branches… apart from Me you can do nothing.”* **John 15:5** It is **a relationship** with Jesus, that matters, **not religion**.

 It’s only when we are connected to Jesus that we can change this world. And the Bible is filled with reminders of that truth. Reminders that we can’t do this stuff by ourselves.

 Paul wrote: *“I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength”* **Philippians 4:13**

 One of my favorite passages is **Isaiah 40:30-31** *“Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”*

 One particularly interesting passage reflects on the time that Paul might have gotten to thinking he was pretty hot stuff, and so God gave him a “thorn” to humble him. Three times Paul prayed for God to remove that thorn,

*“But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”* **2 Corinthians 12:9**

**CLOSE:** **The point is this: without God we can do nothing.** We can carry on with religious rituals all day long, but we’ll accomplish nothing of lasting value. But with JESUS, relying on His strength rather than our own – focusing on His power to supply for our lives – then we can live a life full of expectation and power. We need to lay hold of that truth, because God tells us that now that we're Christians we have JESUS in our lives. We need to live in a way so that others can see Jesus and want to have Him in their lives too.

**Prayer:**

DearLord, fill us with the Holy Spirit that we are overflowing with the love of JESUS, so that others would see it and desire to have JESUS in their life too. Amen

**APPENDIX:**

“WITHOUT GOD” Dennis Prager nationally syndicated radio talk-show host.

While it is not possible to prove (or disprove) God's existence, what is provable is…

 **What happens when people stop believing in God.**

**1. Without God, there is no good and evil;** **there are only subjective opinions that we then label "good" and "evil."** This does not mean that an atheist cannot be a good person. Nor does it mean that all those who believe in God are good; there are good atheists and there are bad believers in God. It simply means that unless there is a moral authority that transcends humans from which emanates an objective right and wrong, "right" and "wrong" no more objectively exist than do "beautiful" and "ugly."

**2. Without God, there is no objective meaning to life.** We are all merely random creations of natural selection whose existence has no more intrinsic purpose or meaning than that of a pebble equally randomly produced.

**3. Life is ultimately a tragic fare if there is no God.** We live, we suffer, we die – some horrifically, many prematurely – and there is only oblivion afterward.

**4. Human beings need instruction manuals.** This is as true for acting morally and wisely as it is for properly flying an airplane. One's heart is often no better a guide to what is right and wrong than it is to the right and wrong way to fly an airplane. The post-religious secular world claims to need no manual; the heart and reason are sufficient guides to leading a good life and to making a good world.

**5. If there is no God, the kindest and most innocent victims of torture and murder have no better a fate after death than do the most cruel torturers and mass murderers.** Only if there is a good God do Mother Teresa and Adolf Hitler have different fates.

**6. With the death of Judeo-Christian values in the West, many Westerners believe in little.** That is why secular Western Europe has been unwilling and therefore unable to confront evil, whether it was Communism during the Cold War or Islamic totalitarians in its midst today.

**7. Without God, people in the West often become less, not more, rational**. It was largely the secular, not the religious, who believed in the utterly irrational doctrine of Marxism. It was largely the secular, not the religious, who believed that men's and women's natures are basically the same, that perceived differences between the sexes are all socially induced. Religious people in Judeo-Christian countries largely confine their irrational beliefs to religious beliefs (theology), while the secular, without religion to enable the non-rational to express itself, end up applying their irrational beliefs to society, where such irrationalities do immense harm.

**8. If there is no God, the human being has no free will.** He is a robot whose every action is dictated by genes and environment. Only if one posits human creation by a Creator that transcends genes and environment who implanted the ability to transcend genes and environment can humans have free will.

**9. If there is no God, humans and "other" animals are of equal value**. Only if one posits that humans, not animals, are created in the image of God do humans have any greater intrinsic sanctity than baboons. This explains the movement among the secularized elite to equate humans and animals.

**10. Without God, there is little to inspire people to create inspiring art.** That is why contemporary art galleries and museums are filled with "art" that celebrates the scatological, the ugly and the shocking. Compare this art to Michelangelo's art in the Sistine Chapel. The latter elevates the viewer – because Michelangelo believed in something higher than himself and higher than all men.

**11. Without God, nothing is holy.** This is definitional. Holiness emanates from a belief in the holy. This explains, for example, the far more widespread acceptance of public cursing in secular society than in religious society. To the religious, there is holy speech and profane speech. In much of secular society, the very notion of profane speech is mocked.

**12. Without God, humanist hubris is almost inevitable.** If there is nothing higher than man, no Supreme Being, man becomes the supreme being.

**13. Without God, there are no inalienable human rights.** Evolution confers no rights. Molecules confer no rights. Energy has no moral concerns. That is why America's founders wrote in the Declaration of Independence that we are endowed "by our Creator" with certain inalienable rights. Rights depend upon a moral source, a rights giver.

**14. "Without God," Dostoevsky famously wrote, "all is permitted."** There has been plenty of evil committed by believers in God, but the widespread cruelties and the sheer number of innocents murdered by secular regimes – specifically Nazi, Fascist and Communist regimes – dwarfs the evil done in the name of religion.