***“Contend for the faith…”*and the God Who Is Good**

Numbers 23:19; [Ephesians 4:31-5:1](https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/scripture/sermons-on-ephesians-431-531/?keyword=Ephesians+4%3A31-5%3A31&ref=SermonPrint)7; Mark 10:17-22 March 4, 2018

**Summary: There are people in this world who hate God. And they don't believe that God is good - they believe He is evil and unworthy of our praise. But is God good? And what does that mean to us?**

 Is God Good? (wait for a reply) Of course He is. That’s what the Bible tells us and that’s what we believe or we wouldn’t be here. But, there are many out there who don’t like God. There are many agnostics and atheists who work very hard at painting God as an evil and wicked God – unworthy of our praise. This is one of the biggest issues you have to contend with in sharing God and Jesus with other people.

 To illustrate how contemporary this is, just 2 weeks ago, after the Florida school shooting, there was an article in the “Daily Wire.” Let me share a part of it to get us started.

 “In the aftermath of one of the worst school shootings in American history in Parkland, Florida, America’s pre-eminent scientists have come up with a solution: **stop believing in God and stop praying.** This is the conclusion of the Most Brilliant Astrophysicist Ever To Walk The Earth™, Neil Degrasse Tyson; it is also the conclusion of Harvard psychologist Stephen Pinker.”

“Tyson tweeted: Evidence collected over many years, obtained from many locations, indicates that the power of Prayer is insufficient to stop bullets from killing school children.”

 “Stephen Pinker stated that such events ‘cast doubt on the idea that there is a benevolent shepherd who looks out for human welfare. What was the benevolent shepherd doing while the teenager was massacring his classmates? If you’re counting on God to make the world a better place you are probably going to make the world a worse place because he is not listening and we saw that yesterday.’”

 This article brings home the current thinking and attitudes in our country today.

ILLUS: I read the story about a university professor who challenged his students with this question: “Did God create everything that exists?”

 One student replied: “Well, of course he did!”

 The professor answered, “If God created everything, then God created evil. And since evil exists, and according to the principal that our works define who we are, then we can assume that God is evil.”

 Do you see what the professor was saying? He was saying God was evil because God created everything, including evil, and thus God was evil. Now this teacher had done this many times over the years. This approach was one of the ways he would attack and undermine the faith of his students so that he could remove God from their lives and begin to build his own philosophy on their hearts and minds and remake them in his own image. And it’s a scene that is repeated over and over again in college classes across the nation.

 But this time, another student raised his hand, ‘May I ask you a question, professor?”

 “Of course,” replied the professor.

 “The the student stood and asked “Professor, does cold exist?”

 “What kind of question is that? Of course cold exists. Haven’t you ever been cold?”

 The young man replied “In fact sir, cold does not exist. According to the laws of physics what we consider cold is in reality the absence of heat. Absolute zero (-460 F) is the total absence of heat; and ALL MATTER becomes inert and incapable of movement at that temperature. Cold does not exist. We’ve simply created this word to describe how we feel when there’s no heat.”

 Then student said, “I have another question Professor: does darkness exist?”

 The professor laughed, “Of course it does.”

 “Once again you are wrong sir,” the student responded. “Darkness does not exist either. Darkness - in reality - is the absence of light. Light we can study, but not darkness. How can you know how dark a certain space is? You measure the amount of light present. Darkness is a term men use to describe what happens when there is no light.”

 Finally, the young man asked the professor: “Sir, does evil exist?”

 Now uncertain, the professor still responded, “Of course, as I have already said. We see it every day. It is in the daily examples of man’s inhumanity to man. It is in the multitude of crime and violence everywhere in the world. These manifestations are nothing else but evil.”

 To this the student replied “No sir. Evil does not exist - or at least it does exist unto itself. Evil is simply the absence of God. Evil is the result of what happens when men don’t have God’s love present in their hearts. It’s like the cold that comes when there is no heat, or the darkness that comes when there is no light.”

 Now I have no idea if that story is true… but **the point of the story is dead on. Evil is the absence of God**, just like cold is the absence of heat and darkness is the absence of light. Is it any wonder then, that when we have pushed God out of our government run schools that we have mass shootings?

 My dear friends, these are the kinds of arguments we need to polish up on and be ready to use if we truly contend for the faith.

 **Let’s see what the Bible says about this.**

 The Bible maintains that God is not only GOOD, but that He is the source of our morality. That’s why Ephesians says: *“Follow God’s example, therefore, as dearly loved children.”* (**Ephesians 5:1**) God is the measuring stick of what is moral. That’s why we’re told to imitate Him. And Ephesians describes what imitating God looks like. We’re told to: “*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.”* **Ephesians 4:31**

*“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”* **Ephesians 4:32**

*“…and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”* **Ephesians 5:2**

*“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.”* **Eph 5:3**

*“Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.”* **Ephesians 5:4**

 Now, this is just a sampling of what Christian morality should look like. But ALL this morality is based upon **imitating** our God. God sets the standard (He’s the measuring stick) for what is righteous and good. In **Mark 10:18** Jesus declared, “*No one is good except God alone.”*

 When we properly “imitate” God in our lives we end up pointing back to God’s goodness. That’s partly what Jesus was talking about when He said: “…*let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and GIVE GLORY TO YOUR FATHER who is in heaven.”* **Matthew 5:16**

 **The atheist maintains that everybody can be moral, but without** **God -** man has no standard - no measuring stick - of what’s moral and immoral.

 C.S. Lewis said of himself when he was still an atheist: “My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?”

 The truth is that one wouldn’t know what a crooked line is unless you knew what a straight line is. In the same way you can’t know what injustice is unless you know what JUSTICE is and you wouldn’t know what Justice is unless there was a STANDARD of justice, a yardstick – a standard that is dependable and consistent. What is that STANDARD? GOD.

 Without God morality ends up being based on my personal opinion of right and wrong. And if morality is based upon your opinion vs. my opinion then morality and immorality is changeable depending on who you talk to. You end up with one person’s viewpoint about morality being as valid as any other person’s viewpoint.

ILLUS: I once read the true story of a man who was trying to share his faith with a University student... but the student wasn’t receptive to hearing about Christ. At one point during their discussion, the student said: “Whatever is true for you is true for you and whatever is true for me is true for me. But no one should force his or her views on other people since everything is relative.”

 The Christian realized that he wasn’t making any progress with this guy as long as he hid behind this rather bizarre form of logic (which is present on almost college campus in the nation) so he decided to try something different. He thanked the student for his time and began to leave his room. But on his way out, he picked up the student’s stereo and started out the door with it.

 The student shouted at him: ‘Hey, what are you doing?’

 “I am leaving your room with your stereo.’

 “I can see that, but that’s wrong. You can’t do that.”

 The Christian replied “I happen to think it is permissible to steal stereos if it will help a person’s religious devotions, and I myself could use a stereo to listen to Christian music in my morning devotions. Now I would never try to force you to accept my moral beliefs in this regard because, as you said, everything is relative and we shouldn’t force our ideas on others. But surely you aren’t going to force on me your belief that it is wrong to steal your stereo, are you?”

 Then he continued: “You know what I think? I think that you embrace relativism in areas of your life where it’s convenient, say in sexual morality, or in areas about which you do not care, but when it comes to someone stealing your stereo or criticizing your own moral hobbyhorses, I suspect that you become a moral absolutist pretty quickly, don’t you?”

 A few weeks later that student became a Christian.

 (J. P. Moreland, “Apologetic Reasoning and the Christian Mind”)

 **Without God, there’s no measuring stick** to say something is moral or immoral. But if I admit there’s real evil in the world, then I have to admit that there’s a standard of what is good. And that standard (scripture tells us) is GOD!!!

 This is one of the **foundational truths of our faith**: God is good and holy and righteous. And He has the right to tell us what to do because He is the one who sets the standards. In fact - **He IS the standard**!

 At the beginning of this series I told you we’d repeat a phrase over and over again: “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 our help. But in spite of that… God calls us to *contend for the faith*…” (Jude 3)

 And contending for the faith on God’s being good isn’t that hard for us because **we have the MORAL high ground**. We have that moral high ground because God’s morality is superior to anything man would try to substitute for it:

ILLUS: Back in 1929, there was a debate in Oklahoma between a Church of Christ preacher named W. L. Oliphant and Charles Smith who (at the time) was the President of the “American Association of the Advancement of Atheism.”

 The proposition for the debate was that Smith (the Atheist) had to prove that “Atheism is Beneficial to the Race, and is Most Conducive to Morality of any Theory Known to Man” (in other words – Atheism sets a higher moral standard than Christianity), Toward the end of the debate, Pastor Oliphant said this: “I want you people to remember that, though Mr. Smith is supposed to be affirming that atheism is conducive to good morals, he has not said one word in defense of the morality of atheism. He has done nothing but attack Christianity. This method of debating is in harmony with the whole program of atheism; it is entirely destructive. In the few minutes I have left, I shall introduce a few of the principles of morality taught in the New Testament. Christ teaches that we should:

Avoid hatred (**Matthew 5:21-22**)

Not be lustful (**Matthew 5:28**)

Not engage in unfair judgments (**Matthew 7:1-2**)

We should love our enemies (**Matthew 5:44**)

We should work toward Reconciliation (**Matthew 5:24**)

We should avoid anxiety (**Matthew 6:25, 29**)

We should be a people of self-examination (**Matthew 7:3-5**)

Respect for government. (**Romans 13:1-7**)

We believe in the equality of man (**James 2:1-4**)

And the universal brotherhood of mankind(**Matthew 23:9**)

We believe in thrift and industry (**Ephesians 4:28**)

Progress (**Hebrews 6:1**)

The value of truth (**2 Corinthians 13:8**)

And truth as the basis for freedom (**John 8:32**)

We should be a people of forgiveness (**Mark 11:25**)

Of humility (**Luke 14:11**)

Of unselfishness (**Romans 12:10**).

Of benevolence (**Acts 20:35**)

And of honesty (**Romans 12:17**)

“I am willing to risk the whole proposition ON THIS CHALLENGE: I challenge Mr. Smith to name any principle of morality that I cannot read in the Bible. Let him mention any virtue he may think of, and I will read it in this Book.”

(Donald R. Fox – Glad Tidings of Good Things 5/6/10)

 You see, you don’t have to defend the idea that God is good. That truth is self-evident. So God IS good.

 **But what difference does that make?** Why should I even consider this as being important?

 Well, the difference that it makes is this: It gives us something to be excited about. In fact, that’s what prompted Jude to write: *“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.”* **Jude 1:3**

 Did you catch that? Jude was EAGER to tell the Christians in this church about what God had given them. But why was Jude excited? And why should WE be excited?

 Well 1st, our God is our constant and unchanging standard of right and wrong. Have you ever heard the expression “Moving The Goalposts”? It means someone changed the rules in the middle of the game. Somebody has moved the goals so they’re not where they should’ve been. Folks use it to talk about when someone just arbitrarily changed an agreement, or changed the rules of a contract. When someone is said to “move the goalposts” – that’s not a compliment. It’s a declaration that someone has cheated… they’ve been unfair and dishonest.

 The Bible firmly declares God that never changes the goalposts. His righteousness and His moral standards have always been the same.

**James 1:17** *“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not CHANGE like shifting shadows.”*

**Numbers 23:19** *“God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should CHANGE his mind.”*

 In other words – God doesn’t change the goalposts and His morality IS ALWAYS the same. The problem of course is that our morality isn’t always as dependable. As Romans 3:23 tells us *“All have sinned and fall short of glory of God”.*

 Does that mean YOU have sinned and fall short? (yep)

 Does that mean I have sinned and fall short? (yep)

ILLUS: There was a high school football game in 1927 between Haven High and Sylvia High, with a score of 256 to nothing. <http://bleacherreport.com/articles/1642147-the-50-most-unbelievably-lopsided-blowouts-ever> Now why did Sylvia lose? Did they lose because someone moved the goal posts? Of course not. Then why? Because they weren’t a good enough team. Remember this is High School – the kids are out there doing their best… but it just wasn’t good enough.

 In the same way, when it comes to being righteous, we can do our level best, but we’re just never going to be good enough to be good enough to impress God. The Bible is very clear that neither you nor I nor any other person on earth will ever be righteous enough to be able to earn our way into heaven. Our score will even be worse than 256 to nothing!

 But then **Psalm 103:14** tells us “… *he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust*” and this is where Jude felt Christians should be so excited! **Psalm 34:8** says *“… taste and see that the LORD is good*!” God tastes good because He is good.

CLOSE: I want to close with this simple story that says it all:

 While praying one day, a woman asked God “Who are you God?

 He answered: “I am”.

 “But, Who is ‘I am.’” She asked

 “I am Love, I am Peace. I am Grace. I am Joy. I am Strength. I am Safety. I am Shelter. I am Power. I am the Creator. I am the Comforter. I am the Beginning and the End. I am the Way, the Truth and the Light.”

 With tears in her eyes, she looked toward Heaven and said “Now I understand. But who am I?”

 And God tenderly wiped her tears from her eyes and whispered: “You are Mine.”

As they said over and over in the “God’s Not Dead” movies:

 “God is good! All the time! All the time God is good!”

**Prayer:** Dear Father in heaven, our Lord and God, we thank you that we can know that you are always good. Help us and guide us by the Holy Spirit to give us the good words that we can speak to others when they say that you are not good. In the wonderful name of Jesus. Amen.