

Eternal endings:
***You can go
home again***

Imagine this: you open your Bible one morning, only to discover that Exodus, chapter 20 is a blank piece of paper. What has happened? The Ten Commandments are gone! You flip over to the New Testament and discover that the Sermon on the Mount has been erased as well. “Love your enemy” has vanished. The Golden Rule has been deleted. All the guidelines about being faithful to your spouse and not committing adultery by having lust in your heart – they’re history. Obsolete.

Former Beatle, John Lennon, once sang: “Imagine there’s no religion. Above us only sky.”

Atheists in recent centuries have suggested: “We’re alone here, and that’s all right. We can find our own way. We can discover a collective good that keeps us from destroying one another.”

It’s sad but true that a great many hurts and horrors have been inflicted in the name of religion. People have worn the mantle of what they perceived to be God’s will, and used the power it gave them to persecute those who didn’t agree. On the other side, how has it been when God’s kingdom has been rejected, when His Law has been shredded and ignored? Does utopia result?

Today, stories are told of people who travelled to the farthest outposts of godless

atheism, and then came back home.

Over a decade ago, CBS and *60 Minutes* uncovered a mind-boggling scandal they called the Canadian lottery scam. Sincere men and women, some of them senior citizens, received surprise phone calls.

“Good news,” the caller said, introducing himself. “You just won the lottery!”

“I did?”

“That’s right.”

A huge amount of money, they were told, was soon going to be on its way to their house.

There was only one requirement. The taxes on that money must be paid—up front. Just \$10,000 dollars, and as soon as the cheque cleared, this pot of gold, totalling

\$240,000, would arrive on their doorstep.

One lady was about to close out her account and send in the \$10,000 when the man called a second time. He had such a kind voice, and he sounded very excited.

“You won’t believe it”, he told her. “I just got off the phone, and the first-prize winner has been disqualified. And you’re next in line. Instead of \$240,000, *how does two million grab you?! ”*

Of course, the taxes now were going to be \$70,000, but what was that compared to a couple of million? A drop in the bucket! And a man named “William Foley” was successfully milking innocent people of somewhere in the vicinity of 50 million dollars.

They used to call operations like these

“boiler room” scams, because twenty or thirty crooks would sit in a secret, windowless hideaway basement room equipped with lots of phone lines. They cranked their way through one “sucker call” after another, working from computerised “mooch lists” of people who liked to enter sweepstakes.

Today it’s much more sophisticated. Buy a tablet and a mobile phone, and you’re in business. These fast-talking charlatans would actually give the “pigeons” their phone number to call back.

“If you have any doubts, give me a call again”, they would say reassuringly. “I’m not going anywhere. If you’re having difficulty raising this “tax fee” money, call me. I’ll try to help you.”

It was a smooth, successful operation,

except for one thing. It was wrong. William Foley knew it was wrong. You know, and I know it was wrong. Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott had a number of his Lone Star State constituents fleeced. He certainly knew it was wrong. He determined to bring Foley and his cronies to justice.

Let us consider the question of why this is wrong. If you're not a Christian, or religious in any sense, and don't bow before the authority of the Ten Commandments, then why is it wrong to make yourself rich by taking money from unsuspecting retirees?

Once the *60 Minutes* piece aired, some of these scammers actually began calling some of the former victims, now claiming to be working with CBS, and offering to "help" them get their money back. They appeared to have absolutely no shame! And why is this behaviour wrong? Is it because

you live in a country where the lawmakers have voted that it's illegal? That's easy, then. Simply bribe a few of them to vote the other way, using the money you've already stolen to pay the bribes.

At a time like that, if you're like a lady in Delaware named Doris, who lost \$200,000 that she borrowed from the finance company and family friends, you would instinctively agree with King David, who wrote these biblical words in Psalm 19 a few thousand years ago:

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true and

righteous altogether (Psalm 19:7-9).

Even the good-hearted atheists among us today would probably say, “No, taking that money was wrong. Even if the Bible is a fable, it’s still right when it says, “... *whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them...*” (Matthew 7:12).

Most people believe that “*Thou shalt not steal*” (Exodus 20:15) is a rule that all governments should enforce, even if they don’t believe that “thunder and brimstone story at Sinai” ever happened.

The great French philosopher, Voltaire, came to the conclusion that most of the Bible was probably “fables and falsehoods”, and that Christianity was essentially a hoax. Yet, in perhaps a cynical way, he was rather glad to have some of the Judeo-Christian rules posted on the

fence posts around town.

In the book, *The Story of Philosophy*, Will Durant quotes him:

“If there is a hamlet, to be good it must have a religion”, he concluded. One of his fictional characters concurs: “I want my lawyer, my tailor, and my wife to believe in God.” That way he would be “less robbed and less deceived”.

In fact, despite the many contradictions and abuses Voltaire perceived in organised religion, he sometimes felt it was a helpful “fence”.

In an article simply entitled “God”, he penned these words:

“You yourself say that belief in God... has kept some men from crime; this alone

suffices me. When this belief prevents even ten assassinations, ten calumnies [or slanderous lies], I hold that all the world should embrace it.”

Someone scanned the moral horizon of the human race and made this conclusion:

“It was said of early Greece and Rome that all religions were, to the masses, equally true, to the philosopher, equally false, and to the magistrates, equally useful!”

The man who stoutly rejected the system in its entirety was German philosopher and atheist Friedrich Nietzsche. He wanted to get rid of the whole thing. In the book by Ravi Zacharias, *A Shattered Visage: The Real Face of Atheism*, he writes about the goals of Nietzsche:

“With such abusive attacks directed at

religious belief coming from so many directions, it was left for someone to cast this creature called theism completely out and exorcise the world of all such influence.”

I find this further comment very interesting: “[Nietzsche] delivered so devastating a blow to theistic thinking that the word orthodox took on a new concept: it now meant being wrong.”

This gifted but confused thinker was so angry about the impact of Christianity and the presence of the Bible in our world that he successfully portrayed people who believed God’s Word as being, by default, wrong. If you thought the resurrection of Jesus was a true story, you were wrong. If you thought Jesus had ever performed miracles, you were wrong. If you thought the Ten Commandments had relevance and were a continuing authority for our world,

that was guaranteed to be wrong.

The great Christian writer, C.S. Lewis, talked about this seeming battle between scientific evidence and spiritual faith, and how sometimes people who believe the Bible feel as if they're caught in the middle.

Charles Darwin abandoned the Bible and never looked back, but what are we to do? You and I both know that Hebrews chapter eleven describes faith as believing something we haven't yet seen, but Lewis wrote about a man he had met who said in frustration: "Faith [is] the power of believing what we know to be untrue!"

In their book, *How Now Shall We Live*, former Watergate prisoner Chuck Colson, and Nancy Pearcey, write about a world where evolution and atheistic thinking is the default mode, where those who believe

are perceived as being blindly loyal to proven fallacies.

Here's their observation:

“As long as Darwinism reigns in our schools and elite culture, the Christian worldview will be considered the madwoman in the attic – irrational and unbelievable.”

Through the ages, atheism has attracted the minds and hearts of those who truly feel that the human race is able to find a collective good of its own and build its own fences at the edge of the dangerous cliff.

Author Ravi Zacharias picks up at the point where a fiery Nietzsche declares the death of God and the idea of a cosmic, heavenly government. “Man was now left”, he writes, “to find his own path, and light whatever lamps he chose”.

Is that scary? Three-quarters of a century later, TIME magazine's front cover announced: "God is dead."

A decade later, they announced: "Marx is dead." This led a college student to remark, only half-joking: "God is dead, Marx is dead, and I'm not feeling too well myself!"

The important question to ask is this: Is it possible for atheism to guide us into a kind of secular goodness? At this very moment, you may be entertaining that possibility.

"I don't believe in God," you say, "and I still drive myself to work each day, pay my taxes, and don't rob banks. I'm not on drugs, and I haven't gotten anybody pregnant. Case closed."

I know a lot of people like that. I have

friends like that. We've discussed this.

"Why do I need God?" they say. "I'm doing all right. I know in my heart what is the proper thing to do. I have a conscience. I can look out for my fellow man without the Beatitudes telling me I have to do it."

Well, the sad pages of history record two hard realities. God's people, the men and women in the church, have often failed to live by their faith and to make a better world through their faith. No question. The second reality is this: the moral frameworks that excluded God's rule and God's kingdom have never lasted. They have disintegrated into tyranny, horror and persecution, in virtually every case.

French philosopher Bernard-Henri Levi, who used to be a Marxist and later found his faith, wisely points out: "Apply Marxism

in any country you want, you will always find a Gulag in the end.”

Through the years, atheists and secular statesmen have said: “Look, rules are simply a sociological summary, a statement, of what works. Laws are good if they work. If the statistics show that they no longer work, then we amend them. We fix them. We start over. But mankind should be governed on this basis: Is something collectively successful?”

Several decades ago, the United States of America had a President who was decidedly devout. His name was Calvin Coolidge. Chuck Colson and Nancy Pearcey wrote that he was so firm in his belief that:

“A nation’s laws were understood to be based on a transcendent moral order (based in turn on divine law).”

In fact, Coolidge went even farther. He said: “Men do not make laws. They do but discover them. Laws must rest on the eternal foundation of righteousness.”

On the other side was Oliver Wendell Holmes, a Civil War hero who served for thirty-years in the U.S. Supreme Court. The same authors sum up his opposing view:

“The influential legal theorist Oliver Wendell Holmes, an avowed Darwinist, taught that laws are merely a codification of political policies judged to be socially and economically advantageous. Law is reduced to a managerial skill used in the service of social engineering – the dominant view in the legal profession today.”

God’s Word is very clear about an important

principle: “*Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s*” (Matthew 22:21).

I believe very strongly in the separation of church and state. Christians don’t have a right to force the distinctive beliefs and practices of their religious faith on their neighbours. The detail of how a person’s religion impacts their political life and views is a never-ending discussion.

But at the same time, a world in which the moral foundation of God’s Word is erased is then left to rest on two things: the collective will of an always-shifting public mood, and the rise of strong tyrants who proceed to have their own way with everyone.

The Christian writer Ravi Zacharias sums up Nietzsche’s views: “Man [must]

rise up and take charge” - *a kind of “Superman theology.”*

And who did? Three politicians who read Nietzsche’s writings, and agreed with them, were Mussolini, Stalin, and a fellow German named Adolf Hitler.

William Shirer, author of the blockbuster work, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, writes:

“Hitler often visited the Nietzsche museum in Weimar and publicized his veneration for the philosopher by posing for photographs of himself staring in rapture at the bust of the great man.”

Nearly a century later, we may feel that we’re safe from the marching jackboots and the swastikas of a strongman who replaced the Ten Commandments with his

own rows of soldiers.

Ravi Zacharias sums up what the Bible said a long time ago: we all pledge allegiance to something. He writes this:

“If God is dead, somebody is going to have to take His place. It will be megalomania or erotomania, the drive for power or the drive for pleasure, the clenched fist or the phallus, Hitler or Hugh Hefner.”

Then he adds: “The superman solved the problem by getting rid of what he saw as the inferior. The Hefnerian credo has explicitly degraded the dignity of women, while implicitly asserting pleasure and sensuality to be the supreme pursuit of life.”

I think about the thousands of websites today where pictures of women and sometimes children are used to please the

carnal natures of wicked men. The Playboy philosophy says that beautiful women are essentially “playmates”, toys to be used as long as they please us.

In downtown Bangkok, on infamous Patpong Road, the row of nightclubs and girlie bars offer a smorgasbord of pretty Thai girls, many of them taken from distant villages where parents are given \$50 by greedy pimps. A few years later, a third of the girls are HIV-positive. What do the pimps do? They simply get more girls. And who is to say that this is wrong, as long as it makes Australian and American tourists happy, and puts food on pimps’ and families’ tables?

Let us return to our own attitudes. Maybe you have had doubts about God and the Bible. Perhaps you live in a city where there are laws that govern everything.

Possibly your own steel will preserves you as a good and law-abiding citizen for your interactions with others. Why then do you need God?

A young scholar named Jack Lewis felt exactly that way. His mother died when he was young, and he was raised in a home where religion was a dysfunctional tool, crammed down his throat. He soon decided that he was an atheist, but he was still careful about how he lived. He was outwardly moral, and he felt sure that he was smart enough to construct his own framework of right and wrong, of good and not-so-good. Who needed a God for that?

All he wanted, then, was to be left alone, so he could be happy. He was a voracious reader of literature, and he began to search for what he cryptically called “joy”. He longed for that inner burst of pure

happiness that says, “Yes! I was made for this! This is perfect! I’ve got it.”

He looked, and he read, and he discussed the matter with friends, but “joy” simply could not be found. The quest was going nowhere. Life seemed to be a dreary routine, punctuated by let-downs and deceptions.

Then two things happened to this great academic and scholar. As he read the dust-covered books of the great minds of his day – some atheists and some Christians – he found that the Christians made the most sense. Their arguments held up better. Their observations penetrated to the core of his soul and addressed his loneliness. He was tempted to stop reading them, but decided that wouldn’t be intellectually honest. He kept searching, and later admitted with a smile, “An atheist can’t be too careful what he reads. There are traps everywhere.”

Then something else happened. As he felt the footsteps of God coming after him (“My Adversary began to make His final moves,” he wrote later), he also looked into the mirror of his heart. What kind of a man was Clive Staples Lewis? He hadn’t noticed the moral disintegration, but he saw with a start of horror that he was essentially evil. He was selfish and shallow. He sneered at others; he was mean, vain, argumentative, uncharitable. He hadn’t just made his own fence, he had also built a high, self-worshiping pedestal and put himself on it. The religion of “me” had made him a megalomaniac.

He wrote later, in his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*:

“For the first time I examined myself with a seriously practical purpose. And there I found what appalled me; a zoo of

lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a nursery of fears, a harem of fondled hatreds. My name was legion.”

So it was that this young, confused atheist, who felt that maybe he had a thousand demons in him, finally gave in and fell to his knees. In the year 1929, C.S. Lewis admitted that God was the Creator and that he was the creature. He became one of the most brilliant and yet humble defenders of Christianity this world has ever known.

His books, such as *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*, have painted an unforgettable picture of God’s everlasting kingdom.

I pray that this will happen to you today, if that is your need. If you’ve been living in the wasteland of atheism, of not knowing God as your Father, Jesus as your Saviour

and the Holy Spirit as your Friend, I would love for you to experience what I have found, and what C. S. Lewis found. It's no accident that his autobiography is entitled *Surprised by joy*. He found that to be ruled by God's loving embrace was better than to be alone in a sterile world of self-proclaimed supermen and dictators.

I love the story, told by Harry Emerson Fosdick, of a young man whose mother, named Monica, was deeply concerned about him. You see, he didn't believe in God, and swore he never would. In fact, he was about to leave his mother and sail away from their safe, godly home on the coast of North Africa and into the bosom of evil: Italy. How could she allow him to leave her influence?

"If under her care, he still was far

from being Christ's", Fosdick writes, "what would he be in Italy, home of licentiousness and splendour, of manifold and alluring temptations?"

But her prayers didn't seem to do any good. This rebellious boy, determined to stay out of God's clutches, sailed away to Italy. And while he was there, he met a devout believer named Ambrose. Ambrose led him to Jesus Christ, and this young convert, once a resolute atheist, became one of the mightiest proclaimers of God's love the world has ever known. You might know him by his familiar name of Augustine.

I know there are great moments of goodness, bravery, and kindness that come from atheists. A loving God works even through those who don't yet recognise Him. He longs also to be our friend. He

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longs to give us His Son. He wants to write His law of love, His law of liberty, His law that protects and redeems, in our hearts. Why not say yes to that offer today?