

Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."
Isaiah 40:31*



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Good Religion

Religion has gotten a bad rap because of all the bad actors who have used it for nefarious purposes throughout history. But it doesn't follow that *all* religion is evil.

"Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (Jas. 1:27).



With the rise of militant atheism in recent years, it has become vogue to cast all religion in a bad light. Religion, we are told, is the source of much of the violence in the world; religion breeds intolerance and dogmatism; religion shuts down critical thinking in favor of superstition. Christopher Hitchens summarized this idea in the title of his book a few years ago: *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*.

The usual response from believers is to counter with all the *good* things religion has done for mankind. But that approach assumes a faulty premise, namely, that all religions are equally benevolent and good. Take a close look at history, however, and the atheists have a point. The list of atrocities committed in the name of religion is exceedingly long. Trying to win this argument solely on the basis of comparing body

counts is unlikely to convince anyone of the value of religion.

There is a better way to respond to this libel. First, the atheist needs to realize that he is promoting a religion, too. Atheism is just another philosophical system that seeks to explain reality—which is all that religion tries to do. Instead of a supernatural god, atheism worships the god of rationality, which has produced a history of brutality just as embarrassing as any religion (the French Revolution, Stalin, Mao, Hitler, etc.). So basically, *whatever our core belief system*, all of us are starting from the same place. *Any* belief system can be twisted into an instrument of oppression. Atheists cannot claim the moral high ground here.

The more reasonable question to ask, therefore, is *which* belief system offers the greatest benefit to humanity, with a minimum of harmful side effects? Is there any religion/philosophy that can truly be called "good"?

James answers in the affirmative. He points to two characteristics of a "pure and undefiled" religion: first, it is

a religion that emphasizes a commitment to helping the helpless; and second, it promotes a standard of moral conduct that transcends the coarseness of the surrounding culture.

The religion taught by Jesus (not to be confused with the "Christianity" that evolved beyond His teachings) fits that description nicely. Jesus spent His career serving the weak, the downcast, the struggling. He was also a strong advocate for moral virtue in marriage and family life, the use of material possessions, practicing unconditional forgiveness, and so forth. There are millions of people today who strive to imitate that example in their lives. The world is blessed by their presence, because their religion is *good*.

In our efforts to "restore" New Testament Christianity, we must never lose sight of this fundamental truth. Whatever the details of our faith, they must not be allowed to overshadow the primary duty of good religion: to show radical kindness to all, especially the weak, and to rise above the ugly attitudes and behaviors of a broken world.

— David King



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