

## Tea Tree Gully Community Church

# Practical Atheism

**Jas 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.**

### Preamble

'Practical atheism', what is that? Talking about atheism in church seems like an odd thing to do. We know what atheists are. But what is practical atheism?

I remember seeing a TV program about a group of atheists who would hold their own church service. They had singing, times of sharing, and gathered for social interaction. They would talk about issues and "celebrate life". But sadly they did not know or acknowledge the author of life. What they promoted was a counterfeit to what a gathering of Christians would do and experience, that is, worship of God in song and praise, preaching a message from the word, fellowship and prayer. The difference is that one has meaning and has the presence of God. The other is a depressing, hollow, meaningless substitute lacking life giving power.

### **They wanted benefits without responsibilities**

They wanted the perceived benefits that came with the forms and rites of such a gathering but not the responsibilities of repentance and obedience. They had rejected God.

**But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves... proud... disobedient ... unholy... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God - having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them. 2Ti 3:1-5**

God was not present. They therefore were left with a very poor empty alternative.

A lot of Christians are practical atheists. They hold to a form of religion but deny its power.

### Introduction

The late Chuck Colson wrote a book entitled How Now Shall We Live?

The question of bringing God's kingdom principles into this world as his representatives and making a difference.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it - he will be blessed in what he does. **Jas 1:22-25**

We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. **1Jn 2:3-6**

This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, **1Jn 5:2-3**

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. **1Jn 3:18**

**Quote:** 'Christians have been taught way beyond their obedience' – Kevin Dedmon quoting someone else.

Atheism says "there is no God". Practical atheism is the description of how we live without the power, presence and supernatural intervention of God in our lives.

**Aside:** Acknowledge that we grow in the things of God over time, but we must be doing something to intentionally embrace and look to grow in the things of the Kingdom of God.

A few weeks ago I shared a message titled The Kingdom of God is like... and in that we looked at some of the parables Jesus used to describe the kingdom of God including:

"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough." **Mat 13:33**

(It's pervasive, influential and without boundary, it should touch every part of our society)

But it's only as influential in the society around us as it is within us. We must be moulded by the reality of the Kingdom of God as we explore, engage (in faith), employ (obedience), experiment & evaluate (learn and mature).

The Kingdom of God must act like leaven in us, working its way into every facet of our lives, effecting our thinking, responses and actions. We are to take hold of and learn to live in a new reality. The real reality of the eternal and unseen. This is a challenging, intentional, ongoing process that requires effort, focus and priority.

### **Three Types of Leaven (Yeast)**

Give background to Mark 8:13-21 including:

Jesus feeds the 5000 (men) (5 loaves , 2 fish, 12 baskets left over)  
Jesus walks on the water

Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened. **Mar 6:51-52**

Jesus feeds the 4000 (men) (7 loaves, few small fish, 7 baskets left over)

Read: **Mark 8:13-21**

The Bible talks about influences on the mind that determine how we interact with the Kingdom of God. These influences affect us as we endeavour to become students of the supernatural.<sup>1</sup> Three types of leaven (yeast) are mentioned in this passage and the earlier one we just looked at (**Mat 13:33** - a parable describing the Kingdom).

### **The leaven of Herod**

The leaven of Herod is an atheistic influence based on the strength of man and man-based systems, like politics, popular will, and persuasion. Herod's leaven excludes God entirely. It's statement of faith is a cynical, "God helps those who help themselves."<sup>1</sup> (mention track and field incident)

If you found yourself in the boat without bread, the person under this influence would advise, "Next time write a list and remember to bring bread. You are the answer to your own problem. Take responsibility for yourself. Be a self-made person."<sup>1</sup>

**Aside:** The world's definition of maturity is independence in the form of self sufficiency. But Jesus modelled dependence - dependence on the Father. This relationship was one of mature dependence that displayed understanding, wisdom and initiative, drawing on the Father for what was required.

Herod's leaven represents one of the big problems in the Church: practical atheism. Large numbers of Christians are practical atheists who disbelieve in an active God. They wouldn't say it that way..... But believers face situations daily without bringing God into the picture. Like Herod, they say there is no divine intervention in practical living <sup>1</sup> (healing, Daniela's testimony of danger, etc.). They are professing Christians but live exactly like their atheist neighbours whenever they face a problem.<sup>1</sup>

## The leaven of the Pharisees

The leaven of the Pharisees is different from Herod's. It embraces God in theory but not in practice or experience. The concept of God is essential to the Pharisaical mind but the experience of God is completely removed. The Pharisees have God in form but without power.<sup>1</sup>

If you found yourself without bread in the boat with a Pharisee, he would say, "God in His sovereignty has arranged for you to be in this boat without any bread so that you could better identify with those who also have no bread in this hour." Pharisees provide explanations, not solutions. They say the bakery closed when the last apostle died. They refuse to let God be active right now on earth.<sup>1</sup>

People under the influence of the Pharisee leaven can know Jesus the wrong way, like the people of Nazareth did. They knew Jesus in form, but not in relationship or demonstration (**Mark 6**) (A prophet without honour). Today countless millions in the Church have been satisfied with Pharisee leaven. They are content with some documentation that they belong to a certain brand of church, but they are entirely unplugged from an active, invasive here-and-now God.<sup>1</sup>

Both the leaven of Herod and of the Pharisees is based on the fear of man<sup>1</sup> (cf cowardice, **Rev 2**). Both are primarily motivated by what people think. But when we are influenced by Kingdom of God leaven, we don't fear what people think about us. Instead we are concerned about God. We live out of the fear of the Lord – which is healthy and brings so many benefits (covered a few weeks ago).

**The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them. **Psa 25:14** (covenant known - benefits/outworking received/enjoyed)**

**Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe. Pro 29:25**

Leaven is a picture of influence on our minds. Leaven (yeast) in the natural realm causes dough to rise. Heat causes leaven to rise.

The heat of adversity, the fire of difficulty causes the leaven in our hearts to rise to be exposed and brought to the surface. But which type of leaven will that be?

**Difficulty exposes that in which you actually trust, and what you trust in is what we truly believe to be true and real.<sup>1</sup>**

### **The leaven of the Kingdom of God**

**Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime**

**Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I'll understand**

These Chinese proverbs sum up the thrust of what Jesus wanted to achieve with the disciples with involving them in the loaves and fishes miracles and other things that they did together. It's about equipping and empowering, utilized in initiative and based in faith.

Some phrases mentioned recently include:

**The Kingdom of God is seen by demonstration and experiencing it.**

**For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. 1Co 4:20**

**That is the nature of our call – it requires more than we are capable of. When we stick to doing only the stuff we can do, we are not involved in the call.**

Bill Johnson

We're not called to be practical atheists but to demonstrate the power of God in and through us. This means learning and doing! Growing in co-labouring with the Holy Spirit.

**Quote:** What we pursue in private God will reward in public.

Randy Clarke

**Question:** What does this mean? Explain, unpack.

The time to pray is beforehand, like Jesus did, crying out to God in private times when nothing was going wrong. That's how to store up power and create an inner atmosphere of peace and faith that you take with you into the troubling situation.<sup>1</sup>

## **Learning to be a Co-Labourer**

“Seek first the Kingdom of God” That means the supernatural. God calls us to “mission impossible”. It's a mission that is impossible in the natural but is possible in Him. All things are possible in Him. This is the witness of the Kingdom of God to the world along with the message of the Gospel.

This is a learning process for all of us that must be pursued.

**Refer again to:** Prophetic word Sunday September 2012

**Unpack, encourage, challenge**

**Read:** Page 164 of The Supernatural Power of a Transformed Mind 40 Day Devotional.

**Quote:** Co-labouring is a huge aspect of ministry that many of us simply do not understand, because true friendship with God is so foreign to us.  
Spiritual Java Chapter 9

## **Conclusion / Exhortation / Challenge**

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. **Jas 1:2-4**

Let's be aware of the leaven of Herod and the Pharisees in our thinking and allow the Kingdom of God (through the Word and prayer) to work its way into every part of our life with practical acts of faith and obedience allowing the power of God to be demonstrated.

## **References**

1. Chapter 5 Becoming Students of Miracles, The Supernatural Power of the Transformed Mind by Bill Johnson

## **Summary Steps in the process to Maturity** (R words):

This is a description not a formula of how we grow in the supernatural in God. This needs to be meditated upon and acted upon consistently.

### **Responsibility**

Commission (**Mat:28:18-20**)

### **Relationship**

Fellowship, Word, Presence, Holy Spirit

### **Renewed mind / Repentance**

Our reality (world view) being adjusted.

We make agreement with God or the enemy regarding reality (what we believe i.e. act upon, not just give mental ascent to)

Every thought and action in our lives speaks of allegiance to God or Satan.

Both are empowered by your agreement.

### **Revelation**

Understanding, penny drops, we see.

The greater revelation we have the greater faith we can exercise.

### **Reliance / risk (faith)**

Childlike faith, simply responding to what is required.

### **Response (obey)**

Action, faith is dead without action

Physical obedience brings spiritual breakthrough

It signals we want to go further. Obedience attracts greater revelation from the Holy Spirit.

### **Release**

Breakthrough

It requires focus, priority, intentionality, time to be before God and his word to be changed, learning the art of being still in God's presence to hear and respond and action in faith (risk), obedience.