

Atheists & Evangelicals Awake!

Nietzsche Being Dead Still Speaks

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), the atheistical philosopher who has had a huge influence down to the present day, claimed that God was dead, killed by 19th-century man with his Higher Criticism, Darwinism, *etc.* But this brought him an overwhelming sense of grief: Who or What would replace this God? And he needed replacing for, as Nietzsche clearly saw, ‘no God’ means ‘no authority, no rule, no solution, no purpose’. ‘No God’ means that man is condemned – but condemned to what? By getting rid of God, man thinks he has gained freedom, but it is a freedom to bondage; man is left in a vacuum of meaninglessness.

It is no use trying to hold on to Christ’s ethic while rejecting Christ himself. To give him his due, Nietzsche saw the futility of those who thought they could keep the Christian ethic without keeping the Christ. He rejected both Christ and his ethic.

Darwin’s theory of evolution, he argued, was good, but not good enough. It is not enough to strive merely for the survival of the fittest. Mankind must strive for greatness. In effect, he must become his own god.

So, if, as Nietzsche taught, Christ is the curse of mankind, what or who is it’s saviour?

In his quest for an answer, having turned his back on Christ, Nietzsche returned to the gods of Rome and Greece. One god above all others – Dionysius, the god of the grape-harvest, winemaking and wine, of fertility, ritual madness, religious ecstasy, and unrestrained consumption – was Nietzsche’s chosen god. Devotion to Dionysius, bowing down at his shrine, living in self-indulgence for today, would bring some sort of meaning for mankind. So thought Nietzsche.

But he found that the void would not go away. Once more he tried to fill it, but yet again failed. Nietzsche wanted to find a

philosophy that would do the job, cover all the nasty outcomes of the murder of God, and stop-up all loopholes. Nevertheless, even though he made notes for his proposed 'Will to Power', he was forced to face the inevitable conclusion: he was engaged in a futile task; no philosophy could do the job. So he gave up the doomed project, using the notebooks in which he was recording his thoughts as mere scrap paper for shopping lists.

Thus he was left – and, so Nietzsche taught, all mankind with him – with a chaos of cultural choice and emptiness. Indeed, Nietzsche foresaw that 'the last men' would be banal, pursuers of the trivial, lovers of self, mediocre, devotees of a 'religion of comfortableness' and self-delusion. He had no answers to the questions: 'How should we live? Why? To what purpose or end?' All he was left with, following the rejection of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, was to accept the consequences of this rejection, adopt the Dionysian prescription, and replace God with an orgy of self-satisfaction and indulgence, with no rule, no point to it all – except to live for the here-and-now, trying to make the most of it, aiming for individual greatness, striving to become 'supermen'. Such was the conclusion of Nietzsche, the arch-atheist philosopher.

But in all this, Nietzsche – for all his intellectual prowess – was simply displaying his ignorance, and so he became a testimony to the truth of God's assessment of the natural man. If only Nietzsche had read his Bible at this point, he would have seen that Paul had summed him up 1900 years before: professing to be wise, Nietzsche had become a fool (see Romans 1:22). Indeed, Paul had detailed Nietzsche's folly:

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate'. Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach

Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: ‘Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord’.

And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God’s power.

We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we declare God’s wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written: ‘What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived’ – the things God has prepared for those who love him – these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words. The person without the Spirit

does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. (1 Cor. 1:18 – 2:14).

Nietzsche did not seem to realise that Paul had seen that men in his day were adopting Nietzsche's philosophy, and that he had predicted that men would go on throughout the age adopting that philosophy:

There will be terrible times in the last days [that is, the gospel age]. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (2 Tim. 3:1-4).

As is plain for all to see, 1900 years before Nietzsche, Paul had precisely spelled out Nietzsche's position – what he ended up with and saw – with dread – as the 'future' of mankind – and all because of man's rejection of the living God!

In an extended passage to the Romans, Paul had argued that when men get rid of God they have to replace him with a god of their own. This need not be an idol of wood and stone, of course; the gods of sex, power, greatness, intellectualism, entertainment, pleasure – the list is endless – will be used to fill the void. But the effort to replace God simply shows the madness and guilt of men. Paul set it all out, delineating the eternal consequences men bring upon themselves in the forlorn quest:

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God

for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen.

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them (Rom. 1:18-30).

Nietzsche might be modern, but he was only repeating that which had been tried before. Indeed he was a living exemplar of the futility set out in the book of Ecclesiastes, proving that:

...there is nothing new under the sun (Eccles. 1:9).

For Jeremiah had summed up Judah's sin thus:

They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water (Jer. 2:13)...

...going on to draw the inevitable conclusion:

...LORD, you are the hope of Israel; all who forsake you will be put to shame. Those who turn away from you will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the LORD, the spring of living water (Jer. 17:13).

Despite the scriptural warning, however, men are still playing the same game. As Isaiah declared:

The LORD, the LORD Almighty, called you on that day to weep and to wail, to tear out your hair and put on sackcloth. But see, there is joy and revelry, slaughtering of cattle and killing of sheep, eating of meat and drinking of wine!...

...the prophet immediately adding the atheist's mantra – which Paul quoted (see 1 Corinthians 15:32):

...‘Let us eat and drink’, you say, ‘for tomorrow we die!’ (Isa. 22:12-13).

Nietzsche was blind to the eternal; he lived and died only for the material. But, as Paul explained, the visible world, the present age, the tangible, the here-and-now – this is not ultimate reality. As the apostle told the Corinthians:

We [that is believers] fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal (2 Cor. 4:18)

Isaac Watts:

*This life's a dream, an empty show;
But the bright world to which I go
Has joys substantial and sincere...*

Who is the Saviour of men? Who gives purpose and meaning? Christ! Not Dionysius! Christ and Christ alone! As Peter declared:

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God (John 6:68-69).

And Christ avowed:

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me (John 14:6).

And Peter preached:

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

Nietzsche had forsaken Scripture, forsaken the God of Scripture, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and turned his back on Christ, the only Redeemer of sinners. Consequently, he lived and died proving the truth of Scripture – the Scripture in which God has laid out the consequences of atheism. Atheists be warned! (We should speak of so-called atheists – ‘so-called’, for as Nietzsche discovered, all men have a god, all men know they need a god, all men invent a god if they reject the one true God). They should learn from, take warning from, Nietzsche. By getting rid of God, he descended from futility into actual madness. It is the same for men today; if not literally, then spiritually, mankind is descending into madness. As the Greeks observed: ‘Whom the gods intend to destroy, they first drive mad’. And, as Nietzsche further discovered, so-called atheists are nothing but fools:

The fool says in his heart: ‘There is no God’ (Ps. 14:1; 53:1).

Evangelicals, too, should listen to Nietzsche. He predicted current Western culture – how ‘the last men’ would invent for themselves a ‘religion of comfortableness’ – the adulation of pleasure, immediate gratification. Alas, a growing number of evangelicals are turning their churches into centres which are tainted with this philosophy.¹ They are going to the world, adopting its principles, and doing so in order to attract the unchurched into their churches, where they entertain them with their programmes, in hope of... what? Are they teaching them that they can have ‘life’ now – self-esteem, indulgence – and heaven after all? Fools they must be if they are.

¹ See my *Relationship Evangelism Exposed: A Blight on the Churches and the Ungodly; Letting Loose A Gadfly: Edward Miall Speaks Today; To Confront or Not to Confront?: Addresses to Unbelievers; Attracting Unbelievers to Church: Points to Ponder*.