

by Wayne Goff

out of religion! I am reminded of the inspired words of the apostle Paul to the Corinthians:

“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.” — 1 Cor. 1:26-29.

It is a shame that in man's self-exaltation he finds a way to leave God out of the picture. But that is often the case, and the world has a history of such apostasy. Of the Gentile situation in ancient times, Paul wrote *“professing to be wise, they became fools”* (Rom. 1:22).

But back to our original consideration: Why are some states more religious than others? The Gallup poll which did the survey of states said that the difference was not due to race, ethnicity, or type of religion. The organization argued that there is *some evidence* that religious changes are made from social influence. For example, one moving into a *more religious state* might cause the newcomer to migrate into a religion there. But that does not explain *the vast difference* we see today between the so-called “Bible Belt” and the Northern states.

Once again I would surmise that preachers a century or more ago found a more receptive audience among those in the South than in the North. Perhaps the Civil War had *some* affect on the religious attitude of people.

Better Or Worse?

Now the question comes to mind as to whether these states are better or worse for their religious influences.

Personally, I believe that **religion** is good for mankind from a purely social standpoint. The idea behind “religion” is to “bind again.” It is a form of “**government**.” “**Govern**” carries with it the idea of *regulating*, and man has proven throughout all of human history that he is in need of *regulation*! One can ask if America is better off today with its lax religious atmosphere, and the resounding answer is “**NO!**” We have **more** violence, **more** crime, **more** disrespect, **weaker** families, and **less** self-control as a result. Our nation is not safer than it was fifty years ago! Voltaire is credited with having said, “If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him.” The downward spiral of our country's morality is a testimony to this truth.

Thus, we must conclude that religious states are better off than less religious states. But even that has a **condition**! The **condition** is if those states **practice** what they profess! We can take a quick glance back at the Old Testament prophets of Israel and read their condemnations of the nation when it departed from its religion!

For example, the prophet **Amos** condemned northern Israel for satiating their desire for wealth at the expense of the poor (Amos 5:11-12; 8:4), for despising what was holy (2:6-8), for political violence (3:9-10), and for hating justice (5:10)! Their religion did them no good because they did not practice it!

God's **judgments** on the Gentile nations through Jeremiah (Jer. 46-51) follow similar veins. These nations were condemned for violence, injustice, pride, oppression of the poor, etc. There is a universal justice enacted by God in His time. *“The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God”* (Psalm 9:17). God's nature of being *longsuffering* should not be mistaken by finite man as godly apathy! It took four hundred years for the *“iniquity of the Amorites”* to be *“full”* or *“complete”* (Gen. 15:16). So in more *irreligious times* like these, man thinks he is getting away with his sins! But he should think instead of the words of Paul to the Romans:

“Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” (Rom. 2:4).

Dear readers, reflect upon the thoughts and Scripture offered in this article. Perhaps you can discover **reasons** for man's godly reverence or irreverence wherever one might live. Your thoughts and suggestions would be appreciated. There are lessons for us to learn and reflect upon to be sure!

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