

# It Is Written

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## GODLY VERSUS UNGODLY RELIGION

*By Sewell Hall*

Ungodly men may not be wicked men but may be not-godly men who do not have a God-ward way of thinking.

Religion by its very definition would seem to involve God. However, there are those who practice a religion that is all about man rather than God. This is what we mean by ungodly religion—religion that is not necessarily wicked but just not godward.

Jesus described such people in His day in the words of Isaiah: "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:8,9). Paul writes of those who are "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" while at the same time "holding a form of godliness" (2 Tim. 3:4,5). Jude describes some who are in the church, but are "ungodly men, who turn the grace of God into licentiousness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ" (Jude 4).

Why would ungodly individuals continue to profess religion? Some do so, "supposing that godliness is a way of gain" (1 Tim. 6:5). Others, like Diotrophes (3 Jn. 9), love the preeminence that they have attained in the church. Or, like the rulers of Jn. 12:43, they may love "the praise of men more than than the praise of God."

**Contrasting Churches:**—Local churches may be led either by godly or ungodly (not godly) men -- that is, by men who are most concerned for God and things of the Spirit or by men whose concerns are primarily human and temporal. Such churches can be distinguished by the following:

**Goals:**—Godly leaders have as their goal "the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, but the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head -- Christ" (Eph. 4:12-15). Ungodly men have as their primary goal increasing numbers -- a big church. They consider numerical growth proof of God's approval.

**Doctrine:**—Godly leaders are determined to abide in the doctrine of Christ and not to go beyond it (2 Jn. 9). Knowing that most of the public "will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Tim. 4:3,4), ungodly leaders provide the teachers that will tickle their ears.

**Discipline:**—Godly leaders insist that in harmony with God's instructions the church "withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly" (2 Thess. 3:6). Ungodly leaders advertise: "Come as you are" and boast that they are not judgmental, receiving everyone regardless of lifestyle.

**Worship:**—Godly leaders insist that God be worshiped "acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. 12:28) while ungodly men place great emphasis on "worship" that pleases the public. They seem concerned only that everyone leave "feeling good about themselves" and eager to return.

**Preachers:**—Godly leaders are not nearly as concerned with excellence of speech or of wisdom as that preachers be "determined not to know anything, ... save Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:1,2). Ungodly leaders insist that preachers be entertaining and personally popular, even with the world.

**Activities:**— Godly leaders test every proposed action by the Scriptures, determined to "do all in the name of (by the authority of) the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17) while ungodly leaders offer whatever people want -- sports, entertainment, education, feasts, travel -- with little apparent concern for what God wants.

**Testing Ourselves:**—The Bible blesses those who "hunger and thirst after righteousness" (Matt. 5:6). By contrast it condemns those who have "pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thess. 2:12). Our taste in churches will help us determine which we are.

How will a person who has "pleasure in unrighteousness" feel about a church whose goal above all other things is to remake him into the image of Christ, whose doctrine is "the apostles' teaching," where he is put on notice that he must live a godly life or be disfellowshipped, where worship is designed exclusively to please God, where preachers preach only the Word of God—reproving, rebuking and exhorting—and where activities are altogether spiritual?

On the other hand, how will one who is hungry and thirsty for righteousness feel about a church he visits where he receives nothing but entertainment, where the "sermons" are little more than jokes and pop psychology, where sin is never rebuked, sinners never convicted or exhorted, and where activities are the same as those offered at a public school, theater, or country club?

What kind of church are you seeking—the church of your choice or the church of God's choice? A godly church or a not-godly church?

## Revenge or Kindness?

*By Alan Smith*

I suspect that few of us would admit to living by the motto, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (Matthew 5:38), but let's be honest -- there is something in us that enjoys the idea of getting revenge. Some of the more popular movies throughout the past years have been those that opened with someone being mistreated. We spend the rest of the movie anxiously waiting for the hero to get the opportunity to exact his revenge -- and then we cheer!

It's not much different on a personal level. I suspect that whenever somebody does you wrong, the temptation is there to immediately start thinking of what you can do to get them back. But, if you find yourself tempted to take revenge, may I suggest two things:

(1) Resist the temptation to exchange evil for evil. That temptation will always be strong and we need realize that it will be there. But we also need to remember the emptiness and hollowness of revenge and resentment.

(2) Show your enemy kindness. Abraham Lincoln was once accused of being too nice to his enemy. He was told to be firmer; he must destroy his enemies. He replied, "I do destroy them when they become my friends."

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." (Matt. 5:43-44).