

Excuse Me, God!

Michael Newdow, a Sacramento, California, physician with a law degree became the most famous, or infamous depending on how you look at it, person in America this past week.

He's been praised as a staunch defender of freedom by some. He's called a nut by others. And his accumulation of death threats is growing by leaps and bounds.

Dr. Newdow is the one who brought the lawsuit in behalf of his daughter, that led the three-member panel of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals to rule that the pledge of allegiance is unconstitutional because it contains the words "under God."

When asked on CNN, "At what point did your daughter come home to you and say she was ostracized for not saying the Pledge of Allegiance?"

He answered, "My daughter is in the lawsuit because you need that for standing. I brought this case because I am an atheist and this offends me..."

He said, "One day I was just looking at coins. (that) is what brought this up. I saw "In God We Trust" on my coins. I said, "I don't trust in God," what is this? And I recalled there was something in the Constitution that said you're not allowed to do that and so I did some research.

And as soon as I did the research, I realized the law seemed to be on my side and I filed the suit. It's a cool thing to do. Everyone should try it."

"Our churches are very strong in this nation and I think that's great and everybody should have the ability to worship as he or she sees fit. I choose to worship not believing in God and government should not thrust a religious idea down my throat."

I don't know if it was a Freudian slip or not but Mr. Newdow hit the nail on the head when he said, "I choose to *worship* not believing in God..." We all worship something.

I don't know how his daughter feels about all this or what she believes, but I'd love to know more about her dad. I love to know what drives some one to be so antagonistic toward God.

Dr. Paul C. Vitz, professor of psychology at New York University, has written a provocative study called *The Psychology of Atheism*.

Vitz writes this: "the major barriers to belief in God are not rational but can be called, in a general sense, psychological."

It's usually the psychologists who want to argue that a belief in God is psychologically based. Vitz found as he studied hundreds of famous atheists a common thread: "the atheist's disappointment in and resentment of his own earthly father unconsciously justifies his rejection of God."

He found that almost to a person, atheists have had a dad who was obnoxious or nonexistent.

William J. Murry, who was the basis for Madalyn Murray O'Hair's lawsuit in the 60's that led to the banning of prayer in school writes:

I was born into a home of near constant rage and violence. My mother never married my father or my brother's father. As a result of my mother's constant angry outbursts she could not hold down a job and she, my brother and I lived with her parents and my unmarried uncle in a small row house in Baltimore, Maryland.

My grandfather had never filed an income tax return and most of what he did do during his life was illegal or ill advised. He had no savings. My grandmother read Tarot cards and sent out demons by burning human hair. My uncle kept hoards of pornography in his room and my mother filled the house with statues of mating animals which she worshipped.

From the time I was about ten years old there were socialist and communist study group meetings in the basement of our Baltimore home.

I was taught that because there was no God, there was no such thing as right or wrong. My mother taught me that the most important things in life were the physical pleasures of drink, food and sex.

Dr. Vitz discovered that Nietzsche, Bertrand Russell, Sartre and Camus, Marx, Freud, and even Madelyn Murry O'hair, didn't reject originally God because of the evidence. They rejected God because of personal reasons.

Open your Bibles to Luke 14 pg 1011

I don't know what your opinion is of God and the Bible today but I'd like to challenge you with this thought: God is a party throwing God. God is a party-throwing God.

“Woah,” you say, “Ed that sounds irreverent. What about all that stuff in the Bible about sin, righteousness, holiness, and judgment?”

All of those concepts are there and God wants us to understand each one of them. But God is also a God who celebrates. A theme in the Bible is God giving a party for His children.

Read vs 15

Last week we looked at verses 1-14. There Jesus is invited to a meal and uses it as an occasion to teach about the kingdom of God. He finishes by talking about giving a feast.

Having a party. Interestingly, there are 30 different references to dinners and feasts in the Gospel of Luke.

Jesus spoke about how a selfless person would be "blessed" by being "repaid at the resurrection of the just."

The reference to a being blessed, to the resurrection, and to inviting people to a banquet caused someone to understand enough to give Jesus an “Amen! Preach it brother.”

In the Bible you read about a God ordained celebration that’s spoken of as a feast or banquet.

God established various feasts that the Jews were to keep to celebrate His goodness to Israel. Isaiah wrote: *On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine--the best of meats and the finest of wines.* When the prodigal son came home his father held a feast. The Book of Revelation explains that in the future believers will sit down and feast at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

God is a God who’s planned a great party for those who are His.

Jesus takes this opportunity to give a teaching parable. The guy at the table had spoken the truth. *“Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!”* The word “blessed” is a translation of the Greek word *makarios* which means “happy.” Happy are those who eat in God’s coming feast. Happy are those who attend God’s eternal party.

We'll see three things in this parable today.

I. God is Planning a Celebration

Read vs 16-17

The "certain man" in this story represents God. All commentators agree on that. What's interesting and instructive is that this man, who represents God, is "preparing a great banquet. . ." The word translated "great" is *megas* in Greek. In other words, God is preparing for a mega celebration or a party.

Larry Sarver writes: *"This is a rather shocking picture of God for many people today. God is usually perceived as the Heavenly Sheriff who's ready to give you a ticket for the slightest infraction, or he is perceived like a miserly boss at work who you hope to please by enough hard work and sacrifice. Rarely is God perceived as one who would throw a party, yet in the Bible this is a regular theme and presentation."*

I believe that Paul Vitz only scratched the surface in his book on the Psychology of Atheism because he could only deal with the atheists that were famous for their atheism. I honestly believe that if you could get down underneath the surface of most self-proclaimed atheist's lives you'd find that most have very personal reasons for their atheism.

One of them is their misconception of God. For many people God is the ultimate killjoy. Roger Nash Baldwin was the founder of the ACLU. He grew up in a well-to-do Boston family that was filled with dissension, strife, adultery, and divorce. Another one alienated from his father.

His influences were outside the home: his grandfather and aunt.

George Grant writes, *"His grandfather, William Henry Baldwin, was an iconoclastic and nonconformist anti-Christian crusader who spent his life railing against any and all orthodoxies. Roger later would say that his grandfather was "the moving force" behind his "liberal" and "nonconformist" upbringing. His aunt, Ruth Standish Baldwin, was an avid social reformer and cocksure supporter of various utopian causes. She was a founder of the National Urban League, a trustee of Smith College, and a member of the Socialist Party."*

"Roger followed his grandfather into a life-long moralistic rebellion against the church. And he followed his aunt into a life-long association with anti-capitalist fringe groups."

Roger Baldwin saw God as a problem instead of a solution. His closest associates

were hard core socialists and communists who saw religion as the opium of the people and atheism as the way to set people free.

Atheism almost always grows out of a misconception of God.

Romans 12:2 explains that God's will is *good and acceptable and perfect*. That means that living in God's will is going to bring us far more happiness and peace and contentment than if we could have and do everything we could ever want that's outside of His will.

Isn't it something that the ones who are created think they know better than their creator what's best for them!

Here in Jesus' parable God sends for everyone to come.

In First Century world an invitation to an event had two parts: (1) the initial invitation ahead of time, and (2) the actual call to the meal when it was ready.

This was because food preparation took a long time. You couldn't run out to the store if you didn't have quite enough. So to not show up, if you didn't indicate you couldn't be there, would be totally inconsiderate of the host.

God sends His servant out with the announcement: "Dinner's ready. The party's starting."

But something strange happens. The expected guests have other plans. **Read 18a** *But they all with one accord began to make excuses.*

I. God's Planning a Celebration

II. Many Who are Invited, Will Refuse to Attend **Read 18b**

What's with that? That sounds like a really lame excuse.

We make excuses why we won't listen to God when we become preoccupied with something else. The first guy says "I have just bought a field, and I need to go and see it. Please excuse me. I just can't come now." He pleads *necessity*.

Now tell me, who would buy a piece of property without seeing it first? Besides that, it isn't going anywhere.

I have to believe that down in their hearts most people know God exists. The Bible puts it this way: *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.*

They may not know all the details about God. That takes special revelation, the Bible. But by general revelation, in other words seeing the creation itself, people know there's a creator.

Now obviously, if we're the created, then we're responsible to our creator.

They know it, but they have their own personal agenda. They want to do what they want to do and if they answer God's call they know their life will have to change.

Not that we can change and earn God's forgiveness. Jesus died for our sins and rose again so that God could extend His forgiveness to us. Jesus judicially satisfied the Judge of the universe by taking the punishment for God's laws that we've all broken. The Bible says: *it's not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit..*

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

God's salvation is by grace through faith. But it's clear that if we really believe Christ died for our sins, we're not just going to sin with impunity. If we understand that it was our sins which put Christ on that cross we're going to have a different attitude toward sin.

That's where a lot of people don't want to go. "I'm not interested in what God's done for me cause I want to run my own life. I have my priorities and interests and God isn't going to get in the way!"

Even Christians can use priorities as an excuse for not doing God's work. Churches don't have enough VBS volunteers because people don't want to give up their free time. Churches can't find Sunday School teachers because being a teacher would tie them down. Churches have a hard time getting people out to pray because they wouldn't want to miss their favorite TV program.

We can all come up with excuses.

Look at this next one. **Read vs 19**

"I'm headed out. I have plans. I can't change my plans. I have to test out those oxen. No one can do it but me, and I have to do it now."

Or this one **Read 20**

There's a good excuse. Blame the wife. His marriage didn't happen by surprise. He knew this ahead of time.

In Matthew 22 Jesus tells a similar parable: *And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, 3"and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. "Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding."'" "But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business.*

Why all the excuses? Because people have a hard time grasping the concepts of heaven, hell, and eternity. Heaven is compared to a wedding reception.

Bruce Goettsche has written: "Let's be honest, many of the descriptions of Heaven make it sound like a gaudy and dull place. We tend to think of Heaven like a church service that never ends. There are golden streets, lots of singing, and angels sitting on clouds playing harps.

Perhaps you respond the same way I do: Borrrring!

Heaven is not a dire place! It is a glorious place. Heaven is where we will stand in the presence of our Lord. We will celebrate His grace and we will be more alive than we have ever even hoped we could be. There will be singing in Heaven but we won't be singing a dirge, we will be singing at the top of our lungs from the depth of our joy. Heaven is filled with laughter, not tears. There will be smiles rather than frowns.

In Heaven we will understand life's mysteries. We will be with those we have lost and longed for. We will be whole, complete, lacking nothing. In Heaven there will be no sense that life *would be better if...*"

The people who didn't come to the banquet didn't know what they were missing. And I can't help but think that those who refuse the offer of God's salvation today are woefully mis-informed. They don't have the slightest idea what we're talking about when we use words like heaven and eternal life.

And maybe, just maybe once in a while that's our fault.

- . We tend to focus on sin rather than grace
- . We judge more than we love
- . We mourn more than celebrate
- . We are sober more than we laugh
- . We so wrapped up in this life we're not anxiously anticipating heaven.

And we in the process we misrepresent the gospel. Not that eternal issues aren't serious, but there should be no more joyful, excited people than us if we know God and we know we're forgiven and going to heaven.

If we're so wrapped up in life that the problems and the trials control us rather than God's spirit, who's going to want what we have?

I. God's Planning a Celebration

II. Many Who are Invited Will Refuse to Attend

III. God will Fill His Banquet Hall One Way Or Another

Read 21 (through "angry...)

This isn't humorous to God. This is serious business. He created people. He breathed into them the breath of life. He endured their sins and their rebellion. And He sent His only begotten son to a cruel cross for them. If they refuse His love, all that's left for them is His wrath. **Read 21b-24**

See, dinner's ready. The invitations are out but the invited guests don't want to come. What does God do when He gives opportunity after opportunity to people but they refuse Him?

In the parable the host sent his servant out to gather a crowd and bring them to the banquet hall. What kind of people would be found in the streets and lanes of the city or in the highways and hedges? The outcasts, the homeless, the undesirables, the kind of people that Jesus came to save.

These men would have only had one reason for refusing the invitation: they were unworthy to attend such a fine dinner. So, the servant compelled them to accept. They had no excuses. The poor couldn't afford to buy oxen; the blind couldn't go to examine real estate; and the poor, maimed, lame, and blind usually weren't given in marriage. This crowd would be hungry and lonely and only too happy to accept an invitation to a free banquet.

Not only did the host get other people to take the places assigned to the invited guests, but he also shut the door so that the excuse makers couldn't change their minds and come in. In fact, the host was angry.

Most people don't understand that God is angry with those who reject His gracious invitation. The Bible says: *Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near.* Proverbs says: *Because I have called and you refused, I have stretched out my hand and no one regarded, Because you despised all my counsel, And would have none of my rebuke, I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your terror comes, When your terror comes like a storm, And your destruction comes like a whirlwind, When distress and anguish come upon you. "Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me.*

Remember we said people have a hard time grasping the concepts of heaven, hell, and eternity. When the issue is eternal life, when the satisfaction of a Holy God against sinners is at stake, the invitation to come is really a command.

Those who reject the invitation -- for whatever reason -- won't taste of the Master's banquet.

If we're a believer then we bear good news. We're the servant who goes out to bring them in. That's exciting, but it's also something we do with humility.

See, in the very message of God's great feast are the seeds of judgment. God says, "All things are now ready. Come on!" Nothing else needs to be done for the salvation of your soul. Jesus Christ finished the work of redemption when He died for you on the cross and rose from the dead. The feast has been spread out, the invitation is free, and you are invited to come."

The message is clear; if you reject God's invitation, you will be rejected. If you refuse it, you'll lose it. if you live out your life in pride and self-sufficiency in the end all you'll have is yourself to depend upon.

But if you recognize that without God all of us are poor, maimed, lame and blind.
And you'll place your trust in Christ for forgiveness you'll be at the banquet table.
You'll have your spot at the party.

Don't miss the opportunity you have in this life to respond to God's invitation.