WORSE THAN ATHEISM?

Many professing Christians see atheism as the greatest threat to Christianity and morality in society. After all, it was atheists like Madalyn Murray O'Hare who got prayer and Bible reading out of the public schools.

But clergymen in the town of Cranford, New Jersey, would disagree. Some years back, Cranford became the new home of American Atheists founded by O'Hare. The organization moved its headquarters from Austin, Texas, to this small New Jersey town.

Back to the clergymen. Why were they apparently unconcerned about atheists setting up shop in their town? These ministers say that atheism isn't a big threat to religion, not compared with sports on Sunday, "commuter burnout," and the fact that when times are good, people don't seem to think they need God. One Baptist minister frankly admitted, "Prosperity has made a lot of people complacent about faith. Materialism is more of a threat to our spirituality than atheism."

A Jewish rabbi in Cranford said, "There is a struggle here, but it's not with atheism. It is with a culture that is not religious in its underpinnings. It's with sports, entertainment ... all the other things people do with their time."

So what is worse for Christians and the church than atheism? Materialism, the sports craze, entertainment, the internet, and a host of other things people do to spend their money and please and gratify themselves.

It is high time, I believe, that professing Christianity, indeed all Christians, take a long, hard look at ourselves and our values—especially materialism. With booming prosperity in our culture, it's easier than we might think to yield to the goddess of materialism. Because we have so much money and so many things available, it is easy to trust in these things. We may take pride in ourselves that we are not as materialistic as our neighbors who are just a little farther up the scale of wealth than we are.

How is our wealth affecting us? Is it taking time away from the truly important things of life? Is it taking time away from devotion to our families and to the good of our communities and neighbors? Most of all, is it taking time away from serving God at home and wherever we go? Is it holding us back when God asks us to do work for Him, pointing the world to Jesus instead of to the corruptions of modern materialism?

Do we have so much money that we have more and more time and money to spend on sports and entertainment? So now we are tempted to waste our time at amusement parks, ski slopes, bowling allies, sporting events, and worse? Do we spend so much time focusing on ourselves that we do not have time for

others and for God? Are we wasting time and energies pursuing the social media and making new so-called "friends" when we are ignoring family and the people around us who matter the most?

Will we get caught up in the materialistic culture around us so that our salt influence in the world will become useless and the light that we should be to the world is snuffed out? That is more of a threat than atheism.

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (1 John 2:15-17)

~Roger Berry