

PASTOR KORY'S PAGE

FAITH LUTHERAN CHURCH, SIOUX FALLS, SD

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SHARING CHRISTIAN HOPE

As Peter wrote to encourage oppressed Christians, he urged them to defend their faith: **“Have no fear of [your persecutors], nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” (1 Peter 3:14-15)**

It's no secret that the local atheistic billboards have been causing a stir. Our unbelieving neighbors are prepared to share their *godless* faith. Are you prepared to share your *godly* faith? Dale Hemming, founder of the local atheist group, says he wants to get people thinking, so let's use some of Hemming's one-liners to generate some *faithful* thinking!

Some billboards ask, *“Are You Good Without God?”* A rich young man once claimed he was. He assured himself that he had lived such a good life that he had earned an eternal inheritance. (See Mk 10:17-27.) Yet the uncomfortable truth is that “no one does good, not even one” (Ps 14:3; Rom 3:12). When we claim to be “good without God,” we deceive ourselves (1 Jn 1:8). The truth about human sin has never been popular, but that doesn't make it any less true. Does the world around us or the latest headlines *abound with goodness*? Is your own life *flawless*? Certainly there are bursts of good things that we and others have said and done, but then there are those things that you wish no one would ever know ... The truth is, *God* knows your every sin and weakness. He pronounces you deserving of condemnation, but in the greatest of reversals, He sends His Son to take the condemnation and punishment you deserve. Now *there's* a reason for the hope that you have!

Here's a similar billboard message: *“No God? No Problem! ... Helping Others Comes Naturally To Good People!”* If you view faith as simply a tool to learn how to be a better person, then you do not understand what it means to be a Christian. As Christians, we admit that we have an awful problem, the problem of our sin, and resulting death. Do sinful people occasionally, or even regularly do good things? Sure, but that neither makes us “good with God” nor “good without God.” Doing good deeds doesn't change the fact of our underlying condition. We still need redemption! We thank God that there IS a Redeemer, Jesus Christ our Lord!

“In The Beginning, Man Created God, God Did Not Create Man. So Praying Doesn't Work!” This billboard message reflects Darwin's assumption that

“religion” or “faith” is merely a product of humanity's evolution. I hope you see, though, how this claim is *also* a matter of faith. Evolutionists cannot prove their claim that “man created God.” People have indeed worshipped many “gods” and idols throughout history, but this does not mean that the God who reveals Himself in Christ is a human invention!

And what about prayer? How exactly is prayer supposed to “work”? Prayer is speaking with God. It is *not* the equivalent of rubbing a genie's lamp and receiving instant gratification ... I have both seen and heard of too many answered prayers to believe Mr. Hemming's claim! Billboards sponsored by this group have also made references to domestic and child abuse and even genocide as evidence that prayer doesn't work. In my opinion, this *argument* doesn't work. Abuse and mass murders are further evidence of humankind's sin-problem, rather than proofs that God has somehow closed His ears to our prayers.

How about the statistics? *“98 Million Americans Are Non-Religious/Living Happily Without Religion.”* This figure is accurate, in a general sense; however, there are *not* 98 million atheists in America! There *are* approximately 100 million Americans who are either un-churched/de-churched or unaffiliated with a particular church or faith group. What a mission field we live in!

One last billboard quote: *“Why Are So Many Believers Filled With So Much Hate?”* It's a good question. First, we acknowledge that *some* believers (of varying beliefs) truly say and do hateful things. Still, this does not mean that *all* or *most* believers are filled with hate. One final point: you're probably familiar with the saying, “People won't care how much you know until they know how much you care.” In other words, your unbelieving neighbors aren't likely to care about how well you know your Bible or about your church affiliation if they don't see that you care for them.

Rather than inciting “hate,” Christians have consistently been on the front lines of caring for others. Christians have started numerous hospitals, soup kitchens, mentoring programs, and the like. Just this week I heard about the “Pathfinder Center,” a new shelter in SD for victims of human trafficking. How did it come to be? Caring Christians worked together to respond to the needs of their neighbors!

May we take Paul's words to heart about our care & witness: **“As we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10).**

Peace in Christ,

Kory Janneke, Associate Pastor