

VANITY AND LIES

Bill Gates is presently the third richest man in the world, with a net worth of one-hundred and thirty-two billion dollars. Gates is also an atheist. When a journalist for *Rolling Stone* magazine asked him if he believes in God, he replied, “I agree with people like Richard Dawkins that mankind felt the need for creation myths. Before we really began to understand disease and the weather and things like that, we sought false explanations for them. Now science has filled in some of the realm – not all – that religion used to fill.” (Jeff Goodell, “Bill Gates: The Rolling Stone Interview,” *Rolling Stone*, March 13, 2014) Chris Arnade earned a doctorate in physics, and for twenty years worked on Wall Street. In those days believed atheism was the only rational position to take. He became disillusioned with the hypocrisy of the traders, and left Wall Street and made a name for himself by taking photographs of indigent people. When he set out to photograph them, he expected them to be atheists, but they were not. He wrote:

When I first walked into the Bronx I assumed I would find the same cynicism I had towards faith. If anyone seemed the perfect candidate for atheism it was the addicts who see daily how unfair, unjust, and evil the world can be. None of them are. Rather they are some of the strongest believers I have met, steeped in a combination of Bible, superstition, and folklore. (Chris Arnade, “The people who challenged my atheism most were drug addicts and prostitutes,” *The Guardian*, 24 Ddecember 2013)

Arnade’s journalism changed his perspective on atheism:

In these last three years, out from behind my computers, I have been reminded that life is not rational and that everyone makes mistakes. Or, in Biblical terms, we are all sinners. We are all sinners. On the streets the addicts, with their daily battles and proximity to death, have come to understand this viscerally. Many successful people don't. Their sense of entitlement and emotional distance has numbed their understanding of our fallibility. Soon I saw my atheism for what it is: an intellectual belief most accessible to those who have done well.

Many successful people do not believe in God; many poor people do. However, the poor whom Arnade photographed, although strong believers, were drug addicts and prostitutes.

Agur, son of Jakeh, wrote in the Book of Proverbs:

Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.

Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.

Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die:

Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me:

Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain. (Proverbs 30:1-9)

Men are not trustworthy. They lie, and they justify their lying. They tell lies, and their falsehoods do harm to others. They are hypocrites, pretending to be something they are not. They try to appear pious, but they have no

true religion. God cannot lie; He alone is trustworthy, and His Word alone is perfectly true. His Word is like a shield, and it protects those that trust in Him. Men ought to believe God simply because He is God, and they ought to believe everything He says. Moreover, they must not add to the Word of God, and they must not say they speak for God when they do not. If a man adds to the Word of God, then he runs the risk of God's exposing him as a liar, and rebuking him. Men ought to believe the Word of God, the whole Word of God, and nothing but the Word of God.

Agur, after confessing that God alone is true, made two requests of Him; he asked Him to give him two things before he died: he asked Him to keep him honest and temperate. He pleaded with God to remove from him all falsehood; He asked God to keep him from making empty statements, void of truth. Agur desired to be sincere and honest, and not to be dishonest and hypocritical. He desired to live before God and man as genuine, with no guile. Agur also asked God to remove from him intemperance. Agur, in his wisdom, a wisdom which God alone can give, understood that the possession of wealth causes some to deny God, believing that they prospered by their own ingenuity and effort, and without God's help. To possess wealth is no sin, but it is a temptation to self-conceit, to self-satisfaction, and to atheism. Agur also understood that poverty causes some to steal from others to get what they desire. One who is poor, and has no food might steal food from one who has. By theft one takes from another what does not belong to him. Theft is a sin, a violation of the Eighth Commandment, and one who breaks the the Eighth Commandment while confessing God also breaks the Third Commandment; he takes the name of the Lord in vain, which is to say, he treats it as meaningless, as a thing of no consequence. He confesses God with His mouth, but denies Him with his deeds. So, Agur asked God not to give him wealth, for then he would deny God with His words, saying there is not God; and he asked God not to give him poverty, for then he would deny God with his deeds, stealing and profaning the name of the God he confessed. Agur asked God to give him only what he needed. If one is wealthy, then He should ask God for help to resist the temptation to deny God with his words. If he is poor, then He should ask God for help to resist the temptation to deny God with his deeds. Whether rich or poor, man ought to trust God and find His satisfaction in Him.

Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen