

"AWAY WITH THE ATHEISTS"

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It is quite probable that you suspect the group identified as "atheists" in the above quote is made up of those with neither recognition of nor respect for either the God of Heaven or His Will. In reality, had you been a member of the church in Smyrna in the second century A.D., this quote would have been applied to you by those who wanted to see you be ripped apart by wild beasts or killed by the sword or drenched in oil and devoured by flames. You see, to the polytheistic Romans, those who did not recognize their gods or who "refused to worship heathen idols and had no images or shrines of their own" (Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder in Documents of the Christian Church, p. 9) were automatically atheistic.

Is there not a parallel there with some of the ways in which Christians of today are scorned by those who do not believe in the Creator? I have been in college classrooms in which any who believed in a literal interpretation of the Bible were called "flat-earthers." I have seen charts ridiculing creationists by placing them somewhere between *Ramapithecus* and *Australopithecus Africanus* in the "ascent of man." I have even heard the creationists called "backwoods" and "bumpkins." To all "*educated men*," at best the God-fearer is uneducated, at worst he is brain-dead. Just calling the earliest Christians "atheists" did not make them so, neither are we who revere the God of Heaven *necessarily* barbaric or ignorant!

Also, is there not a parallel there with some of the ways in which true Christians of today are scorned by those who do not hold only to God's Word or by those who in purportedly holding it do so by making it fit their whims? I have heard those who simply recognize a law in the New Testament be called "legalists" (not in its dictionary form intimating strict adherence to the law, but its popular meaning connoting elevation of sacrifice over mercy). I have heard those who hold firmly to God's Word in all matters be called "anti" by some and "liberal" by others at the exact same time. I have heard those who simply want their fellow men to be obedient (working out their own salvation [[Phi 2:12](#)]) be called "unloving" or "judgmental." Just as calling the earliest Christians "atheists" did not make them so, neither does calling those who hold firmly to the True Standard "legalists" or "antis" or "liberals" or "unloving" or "judgmental" make them so!

When men were calling Polycarp and others from the church of Smyrna "atheists," God was recognizing them as Christians! While the anti-theistic call God's followers "flat-earthers" or "uneducated" or "backwoods," God recognizes them as Christians! While the denominational are calling God's faithful any of numerous epithets, God recognizes them as Christians. How do I know this? Whether man does or not, "The Lord knoweth them that are his" ([2Ti 2:19](#)).