

Faith & the Atheism of Religions

Gospel: Matthew 15:21-28: *Then Jesus went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, [thou] Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast [it] to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great [is] thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.*

"It is not meet to take the children's bread,
and to cast [it] to dogs."

This harsh expression which appears to be a stumbling block is itself our key to this Biblical passage. The two important words are "bread" and "dogs."

The event of the encounter of the pagan Canaanite woman with Christ coincides with two other events. The first is the feeding of the five thousand, and the other is the feeding of the four thousand with bread and fish. The position of the Jews regarding the miraculous feeding of the people was known. John the

Evangelist clarifies what Jesus said to the crowds who were following him after He did this first miracle: "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled." (John 6:26). Jesus uses the image of bread with the Canaanite woman in order to point to this position.

Jesus was disturbed by the position of the Jews. They followed Him because they had some intentions not agreeable to God. After the miraculous feeding of the people, the Jews coveted Jesus. They thought that God had to be first of all their servant, in order for them to look at Him as God. So they set conditions to following Jesus. Their position is summarized in that they would worship Him if He proved to them that he could satisfy their desires. God has to be as some people want him to be. In this case, God is a servant, even if He is called God. A false religious view such as this limits the characteristics of the goodness of God, in order to make Him God. The position of the Jews -the sons- puts God in a cage, defining Him, and thus making Him God. This cage is made up of our desires and needs. This is what paganism is all about. A god like this one is a new statue. Paganism is defined as worshipping a god defined by humans or created by them. It is also worshipping god according to what humans think a god should be. This "god" has to obey the humans who made him. In paganism god is a servant of the needs humans define and impose on him. Humans can bestow on him certain commandments and rules, which are acceptable to them. At the end, this god is the one who obeys and we are the masters and lawmakers.

Sometimes, religion is transformed into a cage in which we imprison god. This is the atheism of faith. In this is summarized the position of the Jews. The god of

those Jews is a Jewish statue, and not the Savior Jesus. The position of Christ (in Matthew 15:26) towards "God" seems to be a covered paganism. In this position, Christ is showing the following false attitude. Man is the master who is knowledgeable and just, and God is the merciful. If this God obeys us, we will make a statue for him, and if he refuses, we will lift him up on a cross. The hidden paganism of the Jews had crucified Christ.

This paganism has been the cancer of religion for ages and ages. The pagan view of the Jews at the time of Jesus is also befalling us every day. Often we wait for God to prove to us that he is able to act as the master of humanity. In many cases, we deal with God as a servant of ours. We lift him up to the divinity, then we lower him down to nothingness through our atheist attitude. The Holy Bible is often susceptible for our criticism and judgements. This god has to be the subject of "his children," making himself fit for serving them through his designated high position.

As for the hard word "dogs" used in the passage, Jesus employed it to compare the position of the Canaanite woman vis-à-vis that of the Jews. They used to call the Canaanites who were not Jews, dogs. The Canaanites were pagans. They used to celebrate their feasts by an illicit worship. Their worship was a secret, bloody, and filthy series of actions. They offered their children, born out of fornication during celebrations, as sacrifices to their gods. The Jews saw these practices, as shameful, not committed even by dogs. Judaism on the other hand was the religion of the "chosen children of God." The pagan practices were inhuman.

When this woman, knowledgeable of her people's practices, approached Jesus, she was led to repentance.

Yes, she said, even the dogs eat crumbs fallen from their masters' table. How great is Confession. How strong is Repentance.

The Jews came to Jesus after the miracles, and were trying to seize profit for themselves. They put conditions on his work, and by doing so they became atheists in their religion, when they put God under tests and conditions. As for this pagan woman, she looked to Jesus as the Savior, asking for mercy. The position of this woman was that of the servant in front of his master, "Have mercy on me, Son of David." The position of the servant is expressed by one word., "Have Mercy on me," but the prideful paganism is expressed by conditions put on faith.

In true faith, God is the master of the mercy. In paganism, god is the servant of requests. By true faith, however, we fall helpless on the feet of God, but by paganism, we enslave God to our desires and requests. Facing the love and compassion of God, Man by faith repents. But the religion of conditions is paganism. In one word, worship means obedience. But the conditional requests are pagan attitudes of revolt against God.

Let us not then enslave God in our worship. Let's not be pagans in our religions. Repentance and the broken heart is our only way to the loving God. God is worshipped by Spirit and truth. God does not look at us through our religious identity. He looks at our heart, and how much it is broken, humble and pious. The sacrifice is a broken spirit. Whoever is not humbled in front of God is a worshiping pagan. The faith of this pagan woman, built on repentance, has taken from Christ what the religion of the Jews of Nazareth was not able to gain. "He did not many mighty works there because of their

unbelief" (Mat 13:58) Jesus shouted in Nazareth, "A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house" (Mat 13:56), but to the Cananite he said, "O woman, great [is] thy faith."

Sonship to God is a repentant heart. We do not worship the Lord just by keeping the commandants. God knows our needs before we ask of him. Let's then ask the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and everything else will be added to us. When we worship the love of God, we become sons, but when we put conditions on this love, we become "pagans." Belief is obedience, but atheism putting God under the test. We ought to ask God, as children do, His Mercy. We are in great need of God's mercy, but God does not need to proof his love. Christ asks for those who worship him by Sprit and Truth, and those who come to him believing in their unworthiness.

The Lord Jesus came to us as a Savior, and we approach him with a broken and repentant spirit. Christ did not come as a teacher or a primate of a denomination. Repentance is the Kingdom of the sons.

The medium between God and man is only repentance. Through this repentance, we gain Sonship. The Judaic Righteousness is the atheistic mentality of the ages, which is built on a conditional divinity.

It is not good then for the divine love, which is the bread of the sons who are asking mercy by repentance, to be thrown to pagan dogs who try God by conditions. Whoever owned repentance as a way will hear from Jesus, "My Son, great is your faith."

Amen.