



## Why dialogue about other gods and Jesus?

Over the past three weeks we have compared and contrasted the teachings of Jesus and his earliest followers with those of supposed gods and gurus, philosophers and prophets. It is good to *compare* because it helps us see the common humanity in others who believe differently from us. It also helps us find common ground on which we can begin presenting the Gospel. But it is also important to *contrast* our faith with those the other worldviews that are available today.

The Scriptures remind us to “test every spirit to see if it is of God” and we are charged to “earnestly contend for the faith that was once delivered to the saints”. We must know what is out there. We must know what is being believed. By comparing the message of Jesus with the message of the gods we begin to see where Jesus stands out. We must be aware of the different shades of reality—because not everything is black and white.

We discuss Jesus amongst the gods because, well, it allows us to discuss Jesus. Jesus—the Way, the Truth, and Life. Jesus—the Only Way to the Father. Jesus—the Only Begotten Son of God who is filled with grace and truth. Why Jesus amongst the gods? Because “the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written:

***“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;  
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”***

Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.” (1 Cor. 1:18-25)

*“The single greatest cause of atheism in the world today is Christians, who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, and then walk out the door and deny him by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable”*

Brennan Manning

*"[When I was an atheist] my argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of **just** and **unjust**? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust? If the whole show was bad and senseless from A to Z, so to speak, why did I, who was supposed to be part of the show, find myself in such violent reaction against it?...Thus in the very act of trying to prove that God did not exist—in other words that the whole reality was senseless—I found that I was forced to assume that one part of reality—namely my idea of justice—was full of sense. Consequently, atheism turned out to be **too simple**. If the whole universe had no meaning, we should have never found out it has no meaning."*

C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 45-46

One of modern atheism's most basic claims (see Richard Dawkins in *The Root of All Evil*) is that faith is a "process of non-thinking." Alister McGrath says, "The very action of giving a well informed, thoughtful response to an atheist, especially in public undermines [an atheists most basic claim]."

## Introduction to Atheism in Two Minutes:

Most the world's population is religious. There are over two billion professing Christians, over one billion professing Muslims, and about one billion adherents to some form of Hinduism. In addition we have Buddhism, Confucianism, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, Taoism, and hundreds of branch sects like Mormonism that resemble another religion yet are in many ways distinct. That being said it is safe to say that those who deny the possibility of the existence of a god (atheist) or whether or not it is even possible to know if a god exist (agnosticism) are in the minority.

Yet atheism exists and the voices that support this worldview are loud. Individuals like Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hutchinson have brought atheism roaring back within the last several years and this time it is here with a vengeance. The goal of atheism—at least this brand—is to convince society that the idea of god is a farce and that people everywhere would be better or without this superstition. If the human race will ever achieve greatness she will have to forge her own path and make her own definitions along the way.

### 1. "For the religious mind it is hard to conceive of someone denying the existence or know-ability of God. Can you give a few reasons why someone might reach this conclusion?"

Experience is one. If someone has had prayers go unanswered or has been shafted by someone who claimed to be of this or that religion it is easy to see where the idea of God could appear dissatisfying. Another is all the suffering and evil in our world. If there were a God why would any God worth His salt let human history continue down this path toward destruction? Religious history and all the violence associated with the name of God, scientific advances that appear to be able to explain the origins of the universe without any need for a God, and other philosophical constructs that may include one or all of the above can also lead to atheism.

## 2. “According to the atheistic/agnostic worldview what is the purpose of human existence?”

Atheism cannot appeal to a Higher Being or a God whose very nature brings forth purpose, morality, and life. Since this God is a neurological projection of our own desire for a father or protective authority figure we cannot rely on the absolute nature of anything.

Indeed, if we have morals or if we have values the central purpose of such ideas must be completely pragmatic. We do not kill not because a god will judge us but because it does not benefit the human race for us to all kill each other off. This same premise translates into the question of purpose. Purpose does not derive from a metaphysical reality such as relating to a god but rather is something that we humans must develop for our own sake. We make our purpose and we determine its worth.

## 3. “According to Jesus what is the purpose of human existence?”

This answer may seem very odd to some, but the answer Jesus would give is himself. Jesus is the purpose of human existence. Jesus told the woman at the well that he was the living water. Jesus said that he was the bread of life that sustains us. Jesus claimed that he is the vine and without being attached to him we are like dry, dead branches. Jesus told us that he was the Way, the Truth, and the Life and that no one can come to God except through Jesus.

The Epistle to the Colossians reminds us that all of creation comes together in the person of Christ. We are complete in Christ. Since Jesus Christ is the visible image of the invisible God we do not need anything outside of Jesus to sustain us. As the author of the Book of Revelation writes—Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last, the one who was, who is, and who is to come, the one who was dead but is now alive forevermore.

## 4. “Where does the story of Jesus and the story of atheism radically divide?”

I will contend that though we could answer, “At all points there is a divide”, this doesn’t really paint the most accurate picture. For though Christians can debate atheism-theism on ethical, philosophical, and scientific grounds the odds that one argument will completely trump the other is somewhere between zero and zilch. So this question is not merely about logic.

Nor can we say that it is all about religious/spiritual experience, for experience alone does not prove or disprove the nature of our experience nor does it explain what we experienced.

But I would say with the Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 15) that if Christ has not risen from the dead everything we believe is in vain. If God has not acted in human history then our message is useless. The fact that God vindicated Jesus by raising Jesus from the dead and that there were trustworthy eyewitnesses that were willing to give their lives for a person that at one point they thought had been defeated by the power of Rome testifies to me that there is the radical divide—did God raise Jesus from the dead?

If so—if God vindicated Jesus—then our whole understanding of reality changes. And at this point it is safe to say that our religious experiences have more value—in Christ. The reason for this is we are not connecting our experience with an idea of God but rather with the calling upon of the God known through Jesus Christ. As the Scriptures say, “The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the sons (and daughters) of God”!

## Key Phrases and Terms

**Agnosticism:** This word stems from the Greek word for knowledge (gnosis) with the alpha prefix that negates the word (a + gnosis = “no knowledge”). When used in a discussion regarding the existence of God this word defines the position of someone who claims not to know whether or not there is or can be any God.

**Atheism:** This word is built off of the same construct noted above. It comes from the Greek word for God (theos). Therefore an atheist (a + theos = “no God”) is someone who claims that there is no God.

**Cosmological Argument:** This argument is also known as the “first cause” argument. It suggests that since the Law of Cause and Effect shows that every action must first have some sort of cause it is natural to assume that the universe must have at its very beginnings had to have had a first cause. Since the universe is finite this is especially important. Though the “first cause” does not necessarily have to be God, it must be something like the idea of God since it must be infinite and without the need to be caused itself.

**Deism:** Deism has the same practical implications as atheism and agnosticism, but supposes that it is likely that some god or gods exist somewhere. Deism was popular with many of the fathers of the United States like Benjamin Franklin. Deism taught that God created the world but has since become disengaged leaving humanity to fend for herself.

**Moral Argument:** The above C.S. Lewis quote displays this concept. The moral argument asks why humans must be moral. If there is no God then why should I not murder, steal, and so forth? Atheism has argued for morality mostly on the basis of pragmatics (e.g. “We should not kill each other in order to secure the perpetuation of the human race.”). Theist (those who believe in a God) argues that this does not lay a sufficient foundation for morality. For instance, with the above example, if it appeared the planet was suffering due to overpopulation would it then be alright to murder say the elderly or the mentally challenged for the sake of pragmatics? If not, why not? Theists argue that for morality to have any real transcendent meaning it must be grounded in a Divine source of some sort.

**New Atheism:** A flurry of professors, journalists, and other so-called intellectuals has arisen within the last decade promoting resurgence in atheism. Unlike their predecessors these “new” atheists will be much more militant and driven in their conviction that belief in God is irrational, dangerous, and must be purged from society if humanity is to progress. The most popular of the “new” atheists include Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennet, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens. The new atheists have been challenged by the likes of Christian apologist and theologian Alister McGrath, political columnist Andrew Sullivan, and MENSAs intellectual Vox Day to name a few.

**Ontological Argument:** Though a very complex and sometimes wanting argument, the ontological argument proposes that if we can image a being like God then that being must somehow exist. There are many variations of this argument—some strong, many weak.

**Pascal's Wager:** A theory set forth by French philosopher Blaise Paschal that argued though the existence of God cannot be proven, per se, it is less dangerous to bet that God does exist than to bet that God does not exist. For if God does not exist we have nothing to lose by living good, religious lives if He doesn't exist. But if we live if God does not exist and it turns out that He does, we will have lived a life leading to judgment.

**Teleological Argument:** This argument is also known as the argument from design. It seeks to prove that some God must exist due to the complexities of the universe. Creationist, Intelligent Design proponents, and Theistic Evolutionist all appeal to the unlikelihood that our universe could exist as it does without God putting it together.

## Sources Used and Recommended Reading

Angeles, Peter. ed. Critiques of God  
Dawkins, Richard. The God Delusion  
Day, Vox. The Irrational Atheist  
Harris, Sam. The End of Faith  
Hitchens, Christopher. God is not Great  
Hedges, Chris. I Don't Believe in Atheist  
McGrath, Alister. The Dawkins Delusion  
McGrath, Alist. The Twilight of Atheism  
Moreland, J.P. and Kai Nielsen, Does God Exist?  
Zacharias, Ravi. Can Man Live Without God?

## Questions? Comments?

E-mail Brian LePort at [brianleport@gmail.com](mailto:brianleport@gmail.com) or visit [brianleport.com](http://brianleport.com) and participate in the discussion under the title Jesus among the gods: sermon series notes: Atheism. Pastor Jeff has a blog as well that you can reference: [BelovedDiscipleship.com](http://BelovedDiscipleship.com).

## The Kerygma of a (Once) Blind Man:

*This story begins with Jesus healing a blind man on the Sabbath. The Sabbath was a holy day in Judaism where no work was to be done. The Pharisee party accused Jesus of breaking the Sabbath when he worked miracles on this day.*

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see."

Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath."

But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided. Finally they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened."

The man replied, "He is a prophet."

The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?"

"We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God," they said. "We know this man is a sinner."

He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?"

He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?" (John 9:13-27)

## After Sermon discussion Guide

Read the "quote of C.S. Lewis (above). And now read the following C.S. Lewis quote: "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else." Paul would say, "Everything makes sense through the lens of Jesus Christ."

In the movie *Nacho Libre* Nacho says to his tandem wrestling partner Esqueleto, "I'm a little concerned right now. About... your salvation and stuff. How come you have not been baptized? Esqueleto: Because I never got around to it ok? I dunno why you always have to be judging me because I only believe in science. I don't believe in God, I believe in science."

Atheism touts science and facts for its support of there being no God. Alister McGrath, "Here is a good place to start an apologetic conversation:

Atheist: There is no God!

Christian: Are you sure about that? Can you prove that?

Atheist: I don't need to its obvious.

Christian: I see. So what you're saying is that you cant prove there is no God—but that you believe the non-existence of God is the most likely option.

Atheist: That's right.

Christian: So atheism is a belief, then.

## THINK ABOUT IT

Read Romans 1. What is the result or outcome of choosing to disbelieve in God? If you remove all morality, accountability, and conviction that mankind will answer to Heaven's Court what are you left with?

## WHAT WILL YOU DO?

- Read the quote from Brennan Manning above in the introduction.
- St. Francis said, "Preach the gospel at all times, when necessary use words." And, "It is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching."
- Read Hebrews 11.
- What evidence of God was in Abraham's life? What proof of God was in Noah's life? What evidence of faith was in Jacob's life? What evidence of God was in Moses life?
- What in your life declares that there is a God?
- What evidence in your daily life says you believe in God?
- What is the strongest evidence anyone could leave of a faith in God?

## CHANGING YOUR MIND

Read Psalm 19. Refuse to worship yourself and be your own God and surrender to the Creator.

## notes

