

## Deconstructing Atheism

Q: What are some weaknesses in the atheist viewpoint?

A: In 2009, Richard Dawkins and other atheists placed advertisements on buses in London that said: "There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life." That statement was a give-away. What they really resist, I think, is the moral claims that Christianity makes upon us, the boundaries that are set. The attack comes because they really don't want anybody dictating their moral framework. Relativism reigns supreme.

But relativism is a philosophically self-destructive view. What do I mean by that? When one says all truth is relative (which is what atheism would say), that statement must either include itself or exclude itself. If it includes itself, that means the statement itself is not always true. If it excludes itself, then it is positing an absolute while denying that absolutes actually exist. Whichever way it goes, it is self-defeating. So the philosophical self-destructiveness of atheism starts with its very first statement, that all truth is relative.

Beyond that, I think, it is an unlivable life. That is why a man like Jean-Paul Sartre, the French existentialist atheist, said at the end of his life, "I have found my philosophy unlivable." Oscar Wilde, another atheist, wrote in *De Profundis*: "As terrible as it was what the world did to me, nothing was as terrible as what I did to myself." And on his deathbed he called for a priest.

Q: What about the argument that because suffering exists in the world, the Christian concept of an all-powerful and all-loving God can't be true?

A: Atheism thinks its greatest assault upon Christianity is the problem of pain, the problem of suffering. This is where they run into strong headwinds. What do I mean by that? Well, if this is a moral world, then that attack is justifiable. But how can one have a moral world without God? They themselves don't believe in a moral absolute framework, but the only way to even raise the problem of evil and suffering is to assume the existence of good and absolutes. And good and absolutes can only exist if God exists.

Why? Because questions of evil and suffering assume that human beings have intrinsic value. And the only way humans can have intrinsic value is in a world of transcendent order and design and creation, not a naturalistic one.

Now, the atheist comes back and says, "No, I'm not saying this is a moral universe. I'm just saying there is no such thing as morality in this universe. That's why I have come to the conclusion there is no God." Dawkins, in his lectures to the British Humanist Association, said, "There is ultimately no good or no evil; we are all dancing to our DNA."

But that is a position that is unlivable.

Do you see what I'm saying? The atheist will say there is no such thing as good and evil, and yet they will then talk about Hitler, or they will attack us for being irrational. Well, there's nothing wrong with being irrational unless there is a moral responsibility to rationality. So the gaps are really huge.

Q: How well does this kind of reasoning work when you talk with atheists themselves?

A: What opens an atheist up ultimately is not one particular answer. Atheism is a way of looking at life that becomes entrenched in a person's habits and values. For many of them, it is not so much the intellectual argument any- more. It is whether they are willing to give up the values to which they have committed themselves as a result of atheism, and are willing to align them- selves with the teaching of what God claims in our private life.

Conversion is ultimately the work of God in a person's heart. We clear the bushes so they can take an unobstructed look at the cross. The message of the Gospel is the cross of Jesus Christ, the love of Christ, the forgiveness of sins, the new heart that He gives, the promise and the hope and the grace that He gives to take us through life and to prepare us for that final communion with Him, when faith becomes sight and all of that becomes a reality.

Our responsibility is to give answers with gentleness and respect until the Holy Spirit takes those answers and changes the heart of the individual. Sometimes it'll happen in crisis. Some- times it'll happen in the quietness of a person's home. Sometimes it'll happen in the sunset years of life. Sometimes it'll happen as a young person says, "I'm ready; tell me how."

Q: Even if you can answer someone's intellectual questions, salvation still comes down to faith. How do you balance faith and reason?

A: If we define faith as credulity, as a leap in the dark, then no, that's not what it is. I've put it in these words: God has put enough into this

world to make faith in Him a most reasonable thing. He has left enough out to make it impossible to live by sheer reason alone.

Life is the intertwining of faith and reason—and that is true of every world-view. When I walk onto a plane, I don't go to the cockpit to ask for the pilot to show me his license. If I were living by pure reason and pure rationality, every time I get onto that plane, I should check the fuel stick to make sure that we are tanked up, and make sure this aircraft has all of the necessary clearances.

That's not the way we work. There are links put in place that reasonably allow you to trust what it is that you're doing.

So it is with the Gospel. There are empirical components to the Gospel: the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are empirical facts. If the Bible is a book of history and geography, then it becomes experientially relevant. There's an empirical verifiability and an experiential relevance to it. Faith and reason must always go hand-in-hand. They go hand-in-hand whether you're in the act of marriage or whether you're raising children or whether you're getting into a car or whether you're signing a contract. There are always these two components of trust and reason.

So I prefer to speak of the reasonable trust that you can have in the claims of the Gospel. That's faith. You know what it is that Christ has claimed. You're not just taking a leap in the dark without knowing anything. It's a combination of faith and reason, which are the components to every act of commitment we ultimately make in life.