

All the Reasons NOT to Be Agnostic!

Acts 17:16-28, Jn. 13:34-35, 1 Jn. 3:16

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Introduction: Our Refresh team at IBC gave a report last Sunday's business meeting talking about this team's special assignment and what they're doing to try to help IBC become more effective in our calling. One area they're working on is our mission statement; the current one says a lot of good things, but it's too long and hard to remember. So even though the new one has not been officially approved yet (by the deacons and congregation), here's a sneak preview of the simpler version that's being recommended: Knowing, Following, and Sharing Jesus! Like that's our essence, it's what we're about! And of course, those three key words carry a lot weight, and they all point to Jesus: Knowing Him as Paul longed to do in Php. 3:10; following Him as Jesus invited us in Lk. 9:23; sharing Him in both spiritual and practical ways, as suggested by Heb. 13:16. So we want to take the apostle Paul today as our prime example of someone who knew, followed, and shared Jesus, because he didn't draw back when the task was hard or the people to be won were difficult. He was always striving to become **"all things to all people"** (whether Jews or Gentiles, those under the law or outside the law, religious people, pagans, etc.).

So Paul didn't hold back from going to the hard places; in fact, made it his aim to tackle the big cities, such as Antioch, Troas, Philippi, Ephesus, Corinth, and taking the Gospel to the capital of the empire was a deep goal for him. But on the way the Spirit led him to Athens, the philosophy capital of the ancient world, full of Stoics and Epicureans (the two major schools of thought). He was quite impacted by what he saw in Athens – not the tourist attractions, but the religiosity: it was a city given over to idolatry (humanity's biggest sin!), with many temples, objects of worship, even an altar to an unknown god (he was looking for common ground to present the Gospel). But he didn't hesitate to bear witness to anyone, to Jews and God-fearers in the synagogue, to common people in the streets and marketplace, to skeptics and academics of his day at the Areopagus (Mars Hill). He knew beyond a shadow of doubt that he had the message they most needed! But he spoke that message with particular sensitivity to their worldview and way of thinking, beginning with typical Old Testament themes: creation, God's providence, His personal character, the polemic against idolatry, and final judgment.

In summary, he makes five statements about God, presenting Him as **Creator** of the Universe and **Lord** of all (v. 24); **Sustainer** of life, actively engaged with creation (v. 25); **Sovereign** over the nations: establishing limits for His creatures so they would seek Him (vv. 26-27); **Father of all humans** (vv. 28-29, where Paul cites two pagan authors [Epimenides, 6th century B.C., and Aratus, 3rd century B.C.]; so true clues about God can be found in general revelation, recognized even by pagan authors); **Judge** of the whole world: He passed over their former ignorance; i.e., He didn't punish it as deserved nor detain His mercies on account of their disobedience (cf. Ac. 14:16, Ro. 3:25); but now He commands everyone to repent because He established a day of judgment and

revealed His Agent by whom He will judge all people: the Man of His eternal purposes; definitive proof that this was the Man is His resurrection (vv. 30-31). The people listened, some even to the point of conversion! Can you and I do that with skeptics of our day? (Not necessarily preach a whole sermon like that, but bear witness to those truths!) Can we address the big philosophical issues of this society from a Christian viewpoint and be taken seriously? We have to know not only Scripture in itself, but also the cohesive worldview that Scripture advocates – the only perspective that really makes sense of all the evidence! Think about how much good evidence agnostics have to deny in order to hold their position of unbelief!

1) One argument says we should reject belief in God “because science has proven that the world began with a big bang, i.e., from natural causes.” Actually the idea of a self-generating universe contradicts all the logic of science; it’s inconceivable to have such an *effect* with no apparent *cause*. Yet *THAT* is the wall that science has actually come up against in their discovery of the big bang. Their best calculations and their most high-powered telescopes have carried them back in time to the point of seeing everything spiral down to a single infinitely small point, from which everything that exists suddenly exploded. And with this evidence someone would pretend to deny the God of the Bible, which says He created everything that exists *from nothing!* How is it that *the scientific version* seems to parallel the biblical account in some ways? One version is explained with technical language stemming from the best that science can do but no idea of how the explosion happened (though Stephen Hawking, British astrophysicist and cosmologist thought it was all due to the law of gravity – which didn’t even exist prior to the big bang!), and the *biblical version* in poetic language that perceives the order: matter, energy, empty space, laws of motion, physics and chemistry, all flowing in orderly manner from *the Mind of an Intelligent Designer*, who not only set up all things in the universe according to a master plan, but also placed humanity in a position to be able to study and discover just about everything ... except the Creator Himself (no matter how strong the microscopes and telescopes). Believing in God may not be scientifically provable, but it’s not intellectually untenable either. Believing in Jesus is, in fact, the *most reasonable of all the options*, given all the evidence – better than believing in blind chance creating the universe! Better than believing in meaninglessness, randomness, or nihilism. There’s a much greater basis for believing in God. And what kind of faith does it require to believe it all just “happened”? Faith in random chance!

2) Another argument talks about the success of Darwin’s evolutionary model in disproving the need for God in creation, but Darwinian processes don’t begin to take into account the complexity of creation since Darwin didn’t know anything about *molecular biology*: the structure of DNA molecules, all that complex information in the genetic code, its linguistic structure! For the sequencing of those massive amounts of information in a human cell, the *naturalistic worldview* tries to imagine an evolutionary perspective, but a code simply needs a coder! The linguistic structure of DNA required language, an intelligent mind, the Word! The *origin of information* is as big a question as the *origin of life!* And neither of those can science even touch (in spite of thousands of failed laboratory attempts to create life!). So what *cause* produces digital information? A mind! And what does it take to produce software? It takes a programmer. So what must be behind the information in the human genome?! Can it be that no author ordered all that DNA language? Darwin was actually the first to doubt his own theory because he understood it undermined the trustworthiness of rational processes and of the brain itself! *John Lennox*, British mathematician and Christian apologist at Oxford, likes to question scientists about what they use to do science (“*the brain*,” he reminds them). “*But where did that brain come from?*” he asks them. “Evolution,” they respond, “a mindless unguided process.” “*And you trust it anyway? What about the computer you use? If you knew it were the result of a mindless unguided process, would you trust it?*” “NO!” they respond unanimously. A human brain, with about 80 billion neurons, each of which is a compact analog computer able to sum up many inputs from hundreds of other neurons, is vastly more complex than a digital computer! So Lennox concludes, “All mathematicians and scientists are *people of faith* [not necessarily in God], because they *believe* in the rational intelligibility of the universe and the mind.” If they claim the brain is the

result of a mindless unguided process, they are undermining their own conclusions! “Shooting oneself in the foot is painful, but shooting oneself in the brain is fatal!”

3) Another argument talks about “so much evil in the world” as a good excuse for abandoning belief in God (Epicurus set this dilemma before the Greeks, Job and Habakkuk before the Jews). Once again, this can’t be a valid reason for discarding faith, because it’s one of the basic tenets of Scripture, that the world is saturated with evil due to the hardness of the human heart, and the only hope is what God has done to rescue us. So this argument takes a prime doctrine of the faith, one that explains why the world is how it is and helps make sense of things – then it says, “since the world is like this, don’t believe in the God who actually explains it and offers a remedy for it!” There’s no logic in that! God Himself came and suffered the worst that evil can do to anyone! You can’t throw away Christian faith because of the evil in the world, when God is precisely who helps us identify what evil is, discern its schemes, and learn how to respond to it. Without believing in God, there is no standard for even defining evil – you can’t call anything evil in the world without an immovable standard of good. Everything would be based on social constructs. Belief in God is the only thing between us and the law of the jungle, survival of the fittest, and the reign of chaos!

4) A variant argument says, “Who could believe in God with so many evil Christians in the world, people claiming to be believers, but in reality, hypocrites.” Besides inquisitions, history has witnessed countless persecutions carried out by the church down through the centuries, and merciless torture! So many Christian wars also form part of our “heritage”! And what shall we say of televangelists, Christians involved in disgraceful scandals, or getting rich by deceiving others and using coercive tactics? And then there is your everyday Christian “jerk” who simply never sought to grow in Christlike character! But to all of this, we give the same answer: it is hardly a reason for abandoning faith in God, because it’s a vital part of the Bible’s teaching! If you want to critique the faith, at least read the book all the way through and learn the logic of the faith. Learn *why it teaches* that “religious people tend to be the worst!” (Is. 24, Ro. 2.) Too often Christians think they have God “on a string”; they have everything figured out, reduced to a formula, which they try to follow meticulously, straight to the treasure they’re after. This understanding should be part of everyone’s basic discipleship: all people are sinners – we’ve all gone astray, there is none good, not even one (selfishness is basic). You can’t afford to think you’re somehow the exception to this rule! Even those who received the very first revelation ended up twisting it all out of shape. God knew this would happen (He knew the nature of our inner problem). It’s why He came personally, even though He knew it meant He would be misunderstood, bullied, tortured, humiliated, and cruelly executed by His own religious people! Yet He overcame that evil and offers you and me the same power with which He overcame! Through His reign in your brain! Billy Graham: “If Christianity is valid, why is there so much evil in the world?” [or in the church or wherever!] To this the old preacher replied, “With so much soap in the world, why are there so many dirty people? Because Christianity, like soap, must be personally applied if it is to make a difference in our lives.”

5) A final argument alleges “contradictions in the Bible” to such a degree that annuls the validity of faith. But what contradictions are we talking about? I’ve looked at all the typical accusations: they’re child’s play, simple tensions, linguistic questions, *apparent* discrepancies and inconsistencies that careful exegesis clears up. One of the most twisted questions from an unbeliever was Richard Dawkins’: Why would a good God have to kill His Son to bring salvation to the world? Ask better questions, and it will lead you to deeper understanding. Who invented the cross? Who sentenced Jesus to death? So who actually killed Him? Whose hands are covered in blood? The answer to why Jesus died needs to come from deep inside US ... since no one forced humanity to exercise such cruelty! The question should be, **WHY** did we do that? What was there *inside us* humans that drove us to reject the One who came to show us God’s love and teach us His ways? He was God’s gift to us, but we were in rebellion against Him, accomplices of the evil one. *We* wanted God to suffer! And He submitted to our terrible longing that we might know His true love.

So as we begin to **KNOW** this One whose perspective really makes sense of all the evidence – and to **FOLLOW** Him instead of the world, we begin to be shaped more and more by Him! And as that momentum builds, so does the desire to **SHARE** Him and devote **all our energy to living this out together** – with a steadily growing love for the Jesus and for our neighbors as ourselves – so that the world can have the clear evidence that Jesus said would convince them of the highest discipleship available on the planet (Jn. 13:34-35). I.e., **we as the Body of Christ** are intended to be *the final evidence* that points to the Savior – *the community committed to laying down our lives* for one another and for the world because God came and did that for us (1 Jn. 3:16). Are we living up to that high calling?!