


ALWAYS  
BE  
READY



EQUIPPING YOUNG PEOPLE  
TO DEAL WITH UNBELIEF

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Once Upon a Time...

## Introduction

If you had asked my youth group in high school 20 years ago if we knew a person who claimed to be an atheist, you would have gotten a lot of blank stares. Out of 40 of us, some of us **might** have known how to define the word atheism. But I am confident that less than two of us would have known a person who was an atheist. In fact, I've been working in Christian apologetics for many years, and I would guess that the first time I met someone who claimed to be an atheist was about 15 years ago. Atheism was virtually unknown where (and when) I grew up. Sure, there were kids who did drugs, had sex, stole, and committed a host of other sinful behaviors. But there were virtually no kids who claimed not to believe in God.

That was 20 years ago. Fast-forward 20 years and the situation in the United States is very different. For the past several years I have taught Bible class for the 15-18 year olds at summer camp. A few years ago I started asking the question: "How many of you know someone who is an atheist?" The first year I asked, out of the 42 kids I had in class, 32 of them said they knew an atheist. The second year I asked, 30 out of 40 knew an atheist. Some even mentioned that they had friends who were atheists. The third year, about 40 out of 52 knew an unbeliever. After one class, a young man explained to me that he was not sure he believed in God and thought he was an atheist.

# Always Be Ready



As you can see, things have changed dramatically since I was a teen. Due to the fact that your generation has access to the Internet, you are flooded with ideas, both good and bad. Twenty years ago we didn't hear about atheism, because there were so few atheists and they had no real way to spread their message. The number of atheists in the United States has increased, but not greatly. They are still a very small minority in this country. But their numbers are on the rise, because they have used media outlets like the Internet to spread their teaching. They don't plan to stop, either. One leading atheist named Dan Barker described himself as an atheist "evangelist." He said: "I can now literally say that I have taken atheism to the ends of the Earth." He stated: "If we can divert just one young mind from going into ministry or from wasting time and money on religion, we have made the world a better place."<sup>1</sup>

Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. I repeat his statement only to show that atheistic evangelism shows no signs of slacking up any time soon. That is why you need the ideas presented in this book. The apostle Peter explained to Christians that we must "always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear" (1 Peter 3:15). If the stats are right, your generation is being bombarded with atheism and skepticism more than any generation in the last 220 years of United States' history. You must be ready to defend yourselves against the false, destructive teachings of unbelief. Arm yourselves with the truth, be strong and courageous, and fight the good fight of faith.

## CHAPTER NOTES

1. This is taken from Dan Barker's book *godless*, pp. 320 and 324.



# Chapter 1

## Treating Atheists With Respect

The idea of atheism is as false as any idea ever was. God has provided more than enough evidence to prove He exists. Those who reject this evidence will have to answer to God. But we as Christians must bear in mind that people who have chosen to be atheists are still people. They were made in the image and likeness of God. Yes, it is true that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, and many of them are attempting to teach error that is very harmful. We need to remember, however, that Jesus instructed us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44). When we have discussions with atheists, we should listen attentively and respectfully and let them know we value them as people. We should firmly and boldly disagree with their ideas, but do so in a kind way that shows them we care about their souls. Instead of saying hateful things and being mean, we would do well to follow the advice of Paul, who said: “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Colossians 4:6).

Some “Christians” think that atheism is such a bad sin that they can be hateful and mean when dealing with atheists. This is not true. There is no sin so bad that Christians have the right to be mean-spirited and hateful. When those who call themselves Christians exhibit such attitudes, it only helps atheism spread. For example, a few years ago, an atheistic group sued the government over a

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cross that they did not want displayed. A spokesman for their group appeared on *Fox News* and stated his atheistic position. Numerous people wrote comments on Facebook about the atheists. Those comments were mean, hateful, and unloving. Here are some examples (with the spelling errors included):

“To all atheist die an go to hell haha if I could I would shoot you all in the head with a 12 gauge.”

“Shoot em. At least we know where they’re going, waste of oxygen.”

“I can offend them with a Louisville slugger to the back of their heads.”

In addition to these statements several others used cuss words that we won’t repeat here.<sup>1</sup>

What do you think the atheistic community did with these statements? You can guess they had a heyday with them. They plastered them all over their Web sites and bemoaned the unchristian attitude of American Christianity. I think we can all agree that such hateful sentiments do not express the love that Jesus instructed His followers to have for their enemies. While it is true that all those who disobey Christ will be lost forever, Christians should never express the idea that they are glad atheists or any other group will be lost. Sure, Christians should always be ready to give a defense of Christianity. **But it is often the case that those who oppose Christianity are just as interested (or more) in how you handle yourself when you defend the truth as they are in what you are saying.**

One excellent example of how kindness can influence an atheist comes from a man named Penn Jillette. He is a famous atheist who stars on a television show on HBO called *Penn and Teller*. In one YouTube post, Penn tells a story about a man he met after a show. This man approached him in a kind way and gave him a small Bible. The Bible

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had a brief note in the front and several phone numbers that Penn could use to get in contact with the man.

Penn explained that he thought the man knew he was an atheist and was trying to proselytize (or convert) him away from atheism. About the man he said:

He was really kind and nice and sane and looked me straight in the eyes and gave me this Bible.... He was polite and honest and sane and cared enough about me to proselytize. Now I know there is no God and one polite person living his life right doesn't change that, but I'll tell ya, he was a very, very, very good man. And with that kind of goodness, it's okay to have that deep of a disagreement.<sup>2</sup>

Penn's reaction to this man's kindness says a lot about how a person's approach can open the door to a meaningful discussion.

It is true that most people, including atheists, don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. We have been called to love our enemies and bless them, even (and especially) when that is not how they treat us. Don't misunderstand me. I certainly think we are supposed to refute error and boldly stand up for the truth. But even when we are standing for the truth and refuting error, we can show the world that we love them, we care for them, and we don't want them to be lost.

### CHAPTER NOTES

1. These are taken from an article written by Austin Cline. It is titled, "Fox News Viewers Want to Kill Atheists." You can find it at the following Web address: <http://atheism.about.com/b/2011/08/06/fox-news-viewers-want-to-kill-atheists.htm>.
2. This video is about five minutes long. It is on YouTube at the following address: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhG-tkQ\\_Q2w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhG-tkQ_Q2w).