

# SPEAKING TO AN ATHEIST

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Atheism is apparently on the rise in the UK. In the 2011 census, the number of people claiming “no religion” rose from 7.7 to 14.1 million. Atheism is therefore something that Christians are increasingly having to deal with. There are two basic approaches to atheism taken by atheist:

- A \_\_\_\_\_ that there is no god.
- A \_\_\_\_\_ in God.

It is important to see that these are not the same thing. The first is a positive claim of truth, which carries the burden of proof; the other is a request for proof. A lot of atheists will switch between the two as and when they find it convenient.

## TYPES OF ATHEISM

Atheism is not a uniform belief. There are a number of different sub-types:

- \_\_\_\_\_ atheism. It is possible to be religious without believing in God. Buddhism is an example of an atheistic religion.
- \_\_\_\_\_ humanism. Emphasises human reason and ethics as the basis for morality and decision-making. Has been described as “an attempt to retain Christian values without Christian faith”.
- \_\_\_\_\_ holds that matter is the fundamental substance and everything else, including mental and moral interactions, are the outworking of purely physical processes.

## WHY DO PEOPLE BECOME ATHEIST?

There is a common belief that atheism is a belief rooted in science and intellectual intelligence. However, despite what atheists will often tell themselves, nothing could be further from the truth.

### Example 1

Ryan grew up as a Roman Catholic, but as he grew up was unable to find adequate explanations to the inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the Catholic faith. As a result, he became disillusioned with faith and found an alternate explanation for life in evolution and atheism.

### Example 2

Darren had a privileged and wealthy upbringing. His parents were atheists and God did not feature in his life at all. When discussing faith, he does not see the need to believe in God. We are purely physical beings; the physical universe is all there is and he is not interested beyond that. He is doing perfectly well in life without God, thank you very much.

### Example 3

Rebecca was raised as a German Mennonite, a very strict religious background. However, she was unable to find satisfactory answers to deep moral questions and the resistance that she encountered from the religious community when she fell in love with and married an Atheist led to her “de-conversion”. In atheism she found the peace that had eluded her in religion.

Three different examples, with three completely different reasons; only one of which is even slightly related to \_\_\_\_\_.

## WAGING SPIRITUAL WARFARE

*For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:3-5, NIV)*

The weapons of our warfare are not carnal. So how do we wage spiritual warfare?

### The Christian Approach

- Because people become atheists for a variety of reasons, there are a variety of ways of dealing with things.
- Understand those who you are talking to and where they are coming from (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). Paul adjusted his message to account for those he was talking to.

- His explanation in Romans (Romans 1:18-20), with a primarily \_\_\_\_\_ audience.
- His explanation in Hebrews (Hebrews 1:1-3), with a primarily \_\_\_\_\_ audience.
- This means getting to know people and understanding them.
- Understand why you believe what you believe (1 Peter 3:14-16). This does not mean that you need to be an expert in everything, but that you can defend why you are a Christian. Your personal testimony can be a powerful tool here.
- Make sure that you have at least a basic understanding of science and Christian theology. Even though people become atheists for many reasons, most believe that they have a scientific foundation.
- Most atheists are ignorant of science themselves, so it does not take that much effort to be able to take them on their own turf. Even fewer have any knowledge of Christian beliefs at all.
- \_\_\_\_\_ does not undermine \_\_\_\_\_, despite the propaganda from Dawkins et al.

### Common Christian Arguments Not to Use

In addition to the right things to do, there are also some common mistakes to be avoided:

- \_\_\_\_\_ is just a theory - Everything in science is “just a theory”; nothing is strictly true or strictly false. There are plenty of good reasons to object to evolution, but this is not one of them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ – This is only useful when everyone involved accepts its authority, which atheists generally don’t. The Bible is also not a scientific textbook and should not be treated like one.

### Common Atheist Arguments and Their Rebuttals

In the preceding sections we covered some of the weapons of Christian spiritual warfare. What weapons are likely to be deployed against us?

- The \_\_\_\_\_ proves that God does not exist. This is often mistakenly accepted by Christians as well.
- The Big Bang Theory describes a physical process, not a first cause.
- The Big Bang theory proves that the universe had a finite beginning (which hadn’t been scientifically demonstrated before). This actually opened the door to God’s existence from a scientific viewpoint and was resisted for years by scientists for this exact reason.
- \_\_\_\_\_ provides a complete explanation for the existence of life. This is also not true:
- Darwin originally assumed that life had infinite time available in which to evolve. The big bang showed that this was not true.
- Does not match the fossil record. The evidence does not show millions of years of gradual change.
- Does not account for irreducible complexity – complex structures that will not work without all of their components
- \_\_\_\_\_ is evil:
- This is a gross generalisation and ignores that the actions of the followers and the teachings of the religion do not necessarily match up.
- Also ignores that more violence has been committed in the name of atheism than anything else.

If \_\_\_\_\_ is good, then \_\_\_\_\_ should not exist. Evil does exist, therefore God doesn’t. This is a false dilemma:

- The greatest commandment is to love God (Matthew 22:36-40).
- Love requires free will, since forced love is coercion. For God to receive our love, He relinquishes a portion of His sovereignty over us, which frees us to choose evil if we want. The existence of evil is therefore the price God pays for love.

However, the Bible makes two other promises:

- Firstly, that God is with us in our suffering. God became human himself and suffered along with us (Hebrews 4:14-16).
- Secondly, that in the end there will be judgement, justice and full restitution (Revelation 12:11-13).

Denial of the existence of God appears to solve the intellectual problem of evil, but provides no practical solution to evil itself. There is no judge, so unless punishment is delivered in this life all evil acts will be gotten away with.

Though atheism can seem intimidating, in reality it is not really different to any other religion. People become atheists for a variety of reasons and as such, can be evangelised in a similar way to other faiths. In this session, we have looked at some of the arguments and counter-arguments that are used, in order to better equip ourselves to take on these encounters.