

LESSON 4A – Understanding Atheists (Part 1)

(based on pp. 71-147)



Introduction

Maybe you've heard these lyrics from an Irving Berlin musical: "Anything you can do, I can do better. I can do anything better than you." That's kind of the approach we're going to use after listening to atheists.

Atheists tend to be very proud of certain features of their atheism. In this study, we will acknowledge those things as good, but then we will demonstrate that what Christ offers us is better by far.

Here is a partial list of attributes many atheists claim for themselves and are proud of:

- Atheists have meaning and purpose in life.
- Atheists seek truth.
- Atheists are moral people who are true to themselves and constantly work for a better society and world.
- Atheists believe in justice and mercy for all people.

Atheists have meaning and purpose in life

There is the grand resource of art and music and architecture, again not excluding those elements that aspire to the sublime. In all of these pursuits, any one of them enough to absorb a lifetime, there may be found a sense of awe and magnificence that does not depend at all on any invocation of the supernatural.

—Christopher Hitchens,
The Portable Atheist
Quick to Listen, pp. 104,105

Well I don't think we're *for* anything. We're just products of evolution. You can say "Gee, your life must be pretty bleak if you don't think there's a purpose." But I'm anticipating having a good lunch.

—James Watson
Co-discoverer of the structure of DNA
Quick to Listen, p. 102

1. What does the Bible say about a Christian's work and about having fun?

Ecclesiastes 1:3-4, 9-11 What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. ...What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new"? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time. There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow.

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20 Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him—for this is his lot. Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God.

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Colossians 3:23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.

Matthew 7:26-27 "A foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

Atheists seek truth

How do you deny science? That's hard for me. So, at least in my view, this guy [Neil deGrasse Tyson] makes more sense: to weave in all of the science of how creatures and humans developed over time, big bang theory, all the stuff. Because to me, denying that is problematic.

—Rebecca
Quick to Listen, p. 85

2. Atheists often seem to pit science against the Scriptures, as if science is the truth so the Bible can't be. Why is science incapable of providing the unshakable foundation of truth that athiests desire?

3. Why did God give dominion over creation to humanity? In what ways is science a gift from God to help us carry out the role he has given us?

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

Darwinism is the explanation of life on *this* planet, but I believe that all life, all intelligence, all creativity and all “design” anywhere in the universe, is the direct or indirect product of Darwinian natural selection. It follows that design comes late in the universe, after a period of Darwinian evolution. Design cannot precede evolution and therefore cannot underlie the universe.

—Richard Dawkins
Broadcasting House, BBC Radio 4
January 2005

4. How does Richard Dawkins’ show that his faith is not even in the scientific method but in Darwinism? What is he conveniently overlooking or oversimplifying in his statement on design?
5. David Glass critiqued Dawkins’ book *The God Delusion* on the blog *Saints and Sceptics*. The article was entitled “There’s Probably No God—a response to Richard Dawkins.” Glass summarized Dawkins’ argument against the existence of God in this way:

Complex things are very improbable if there is no explanation for their existence. (That’s why they need an explanation.) God is very complex (if he exists). (In fact, God would be even more complex than other things we want to explain and so God would be even more in need of explanation.) There could be no explanation of God’s existence. Therefore, God is very improbable.

Compare Dawkins’ logic with the Bible’s logic.

6. Read Sigmund Freud coined the phrase “the return of the repressed.” By this, he meant that whatever knowledge or memories a person represses, they stay with him or her and will keep trying to resurface, sometimes with harmful results. What knowledge are all atheists repressing? What are the effects on them?

Romans 1:18-21 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.

7. What are some of the logical conclusions that the atheists' version of truth leads to?

8. The freedom that is ours because of God's truth has more than one facet. What might we include as examples of the freedom that results from God's truth? What does this freedom feel and look like in the lives of Christians?

John 8:31-32 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Closing Thought & Prayer