

Faces of Unbelief and Scepticism (Part 2)

In this message my goal is to highlight the overarching belief system of agnostics and also the post-modern worldview. I will also show you how the Bible has scriptures that speak directly to these beliefs. My aim is to also show you the logical end of these beliefs and the incisive questions one can ask those who hold such views. As we build a skill set for dealing with various faces of unbelief and scepticism, it is important to remember God's heart for the unsaved and make sure that we carry that heart in all our conversations. **Ezekiel 18:23:** *"Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?"* **1 Timothy 2:3-4:** *"This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."*

Agnosticism

Agnostic Theism: Agnostic theists believe in the existence of a deity or deities but also acknowledge that the existence of God cannot be proven or known with certainty. They maintain scepticism about the ability to fully comprehend or prove the divine. **Agnostic Atheism:** Agnostic atheists lack belief in gods or deities but also assert that the existence of God cannot be proven or known with certainty. They neither affirm nor deny the existence of God, taking a sceptical stance while remaining open to evidence or arguments. **Strong Agnosticism:** Strong agnostics assert that the existence of God or the supernatural is inherently unknowable or beyond human comprehension. For them, God can't be known, even if He may exist. They maintain that it is impossible for humans to attain knowledge about the existence or nature of gods or deities. **Weak Agnosticism:** Weak agnostics hold that the existence of God or the supernatural may be unknown or uncertain but do not necessarily assert that it is inherently unknowable. They may remain open to the possibility of knowledge or evidence regarding the existence of gods. **Practical Agnosticism:** Practical agnostics adopt an indifferent or apathetic stance toward questions of the existence of God or the supernatural. They may prioritize practical matters or live their lives without concern for religious or metaphysical beliefs. Their mindset is that God doesn't matter. They believe that if God exists, He is not particularly interested in what we do. **Existential Agnosticism:** Existential agnostics acknowledge the uncertainty surrounding questions of existence, meaning, or purpose but may not necessarily focus specifically on the existence of God. They may explore existential questions without seeking definitive answers. **Aesthetic Agnosticism:** Aesthetic agnostics appreciate the mystery, wonder, or beauty of existence without necessarily ascribing metaphysical significance to it. They may find value in the unknown or unknowable aspects of reality. **Ignosticism:** Ignostics focus on the definition of God or gods, asserting that the concept of God must be clearly defined before its existence can be meaningfully discussed or debated. They may argue that discussions about God are meaningless without a precise definition. They don't believe that a coherent definition of God has been presented.

What is the Biblical response to the various forms of agnosticism?

1. **Hebrews 11:6:** *"And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."*

This challenges agnosticism by emphasizing the importance of faith in God's existence.

2. **Acts 17:27-28:** *"God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'"*

Jeremiah 29:13: *"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."*

This challenges agnosticism by asserting that God is near and can be found by those who seek him. Agnostics need to be challenged to be seekers. The Lord is promising that those who earnestly seek Him will find Him.

3. **Matthew 7:7:** *"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."*

This challenges agnosticism by encouraging active pursuit of God. Are they actively pursuing God or ignoring Him because of the implications of finding out the truth?

4. **Romans 2:6-8:** *"God 'will repay each person according to what they have done.' To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger." This challenges agnosticism by suggesting that those who seek truth and goodness will find reward. At the same time, there are consequences for rejecting the truth.*

5. **John 20:29:** *"Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'"*

This challenges agnosticism by affirming the value of faith without direct sensory evidence. It is possible to know God by faith, without having seen Him. This challenges the agnostics who say God is unknowable.

Questions for apologists to ask agnostics.

1. **What led you to identify as agnostic?** Understanding the agnostic's journey and reasons for their position can provide insight into their worldview and beliefs.
2. **What are your doubts or uncertainties about the existence of God?** Exploring the specific reasons behind their agnosticism can help pinpoint areas for further discussion and inquiry.
3. **Are there any aspects of religious or spiritual experiences that intrigue you?** Discovering areas of curiosity or openness to spiritual exploration can guide the conversation toward shared interests.
4. **How do you define or conceptualize the idea of God?** Clarifying the agnostic's understanding of God can facilitate a more focused discussion on the existence and nature of deity.
5. **What role does evidence play in your beliefs about the supernatural?** Investigating the agnostic's perspective on evidence and belief can lead to fruitful discussions about different types of evidence and their relevance.
6. **Are there any philosophical or existential questions that weigh on your mind?** Exploring deeper existential questions can reveal underlying motivations and concerns that inform the agnostic's worldview.

7. **Have you encountered any arguments or evidence for the existence of God that you find compelling or thought-provoking?** Encouraging the agnostic to reflect on moments of intellectual engagement can provide opportunities to explore areas of common ground.
8. **How do you reconcile questions about meaning, purpose, and morality without reference to a transcendent source?** Delving into existential and moral considerations can shed light on the agnostic's worldview and prompt reflection on alternative perspectives.
9. **Are there any spiritual or religious experiences you've had that you find significant or difficult to explain?** Encouraging the agnostic to reflect on personal experiences can open avenues for discussing the role of subjective experiences in shaping beliefs.
10. **What would it take for you to reconsider your agnosticism or explore the possibility of belief in God?** Encouraging the agnostic to articulate their criteria for belief can provide insights into their openness to further exploration and dialogue.

Postmodernism

Overall, the postmodern worldview represents a departure from the certainties and optimism of modernism, embracing complexity, ambiguity, and diversity. It encourages critical reflection, openness to multiple perspectives, and a recognition of the contingent and constructed nature of reality. When we explore it, we see the impact it is having today on the gender debates and questions around identity. It's riddled with subjectivity where everyone is glorifying THEIR truth. Children are coming forward telling people they identify as a cat. It becomes a challenge when they insist on being a cat but don't enjoy cat food. We feel manipulated to a point where we are not allowed to disagree with THEIR truth.

Postmodernism challenges many of the foundational assumptions of modernity, including notions of objective truth, universal values, and linear progress. Here are some key characteristics of the postmodern worldview: **Relativism:** Postmodernism emphasizes the relativity of truth and meaning, rejecting the idea of objective, universal truths. Instead, truth is seen as socially constructed and context-dependent, varying across different cultures, societies, and individuals. This perspective challenges the notion of a single, authoritative truth and encourages openness to diverse perspectives and interpretations. **Scepticism towards Metanarratives:** Postmodernism critiques grand narratives or metanarratives—comprehensive theories or ideologies that claim to provide universal explanations of reality. These metanarratives, such as progress, reason, or religion, are viewed as oppressive or exclusionary, imposing dominant beliefs and marginalizing alternative voices. This is why we have seen a lot of history books and documentaries being questioned because of what is deemed to be a biased metanarrative. I remember when people would reflect on the Gulf War and some would state that our experience of it was constructed by CNN. We now have a generation that likes to describe Hitler as a good leader and give a subjective explanation of this. Postmodernism favours plurality and celebrates diversity, questioning the validity of any overarching framework. **Fragmentation and Deconstruction:** Postmodernism embraces fragmentation and deconstruction, emphasizing the fluidity and instability of meaning. Texts, ideas, and identities are seen as inherently fragmented and open to multiple interpretations. Deconstruction involves uncovering and dismantling the underlying assumptions, hierarchies, and binary oppositions embedded within cultural texts and structures. This is a belief system that questions and redefines many traditional structures that God intended to be present for a purpose. A good example of this is the deconstruction of the concept of family as God intended. **Pluralism**

and Hybridity: Postmodernism celebrates cultural diversity, hybridity, and intertextuality. It rejects the idea of fixed, essential identities in favour of fluid, shifting identities that are continuously negotiated and constructed through interactions with others and with various cultural influences. This perspective encourages openness to hybrid or syncretic forms of culture, language, and identity. Postmodernists are post-structural in their philosophy. Post structuralism is a movement that was birthed in the 1960's and 70s that emphasised the radical uncertainty of knowledge and how truth can change based on cultural definitions. **Hyperreality and Simulation:** Postmodernism explores the concept of hyperreality, in which the distinction between reality and representation becomes blurred. A good example of this is Disneyland. In a media-saturated, consumer-driven society, simulations and representations often take precedence over authentic experiences, leading to a sense of disorientation and alienation. Postmodernists question the authenticity of reality and challenge the dominance of mediated images and simulations. **Power and Discourse:** Postmodernism analyzes the relationship between power and discourse, highlighting how language, knowledge, and social practices shape power dynamics and social hierarchies. Language is seen as a site of struggle and negotiation, with dominant discourses exerting control over marginalized voices. Postmodernism seeks to decentre and destabilize dominant discourses, empowering marginalized groups and amplifying alternative narratives. **Irony and Playfulness:** Postmodernism often employs irony, parody, and playfulness as rhetorical strategies to critique and subvert dominant norms and ideologies. These playful tactics challenge traditional boundaries and disrupt conventional modes of representation, inviting audiences to question assumptions and consider alternative perspectives. **Cultural Critique and Resistance:** Postmodernism engages in cultural critique and social activism, challenging oppressive structures and advocating for social justice. Postmodernists critique systems of power, including capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism, while also recognizing the limitations of traditional forms of resistance. This perspective encourages creative forms of resistance and emphasizes the importance of individual agency and collective action.

What is the Biblical response to the Postmodern Worldview?

1. **John 14:6:** *"Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"*

This challenges relativism and the idea that all paths lead to truth.

2. **Proverbs 3:5-6:** *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."*

This challenges scepticism towards metanarratives and encourages trust in God's guidance.

3. **Isaiah 55:8-9:** *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'"*

This challenges the idea that human understanding is the ultimate authority. Sometimes the social critiquing can become self-righteous.

4. **Romans 12:2:** *"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."*

This challenges cultural relativism and encourages adherence to God's standards. **God has a will, and we are called to conform to it.**

5. **1 Corinthians 1:20-21:** *"Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe."*

This challenges the elevation of human wisdom above divine wisdom.

6. **2 Corinthians 10:5:** *"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."*

This challenges relativism and emphasizes the importance of actively aligning thoughts with Christ.

7. **Colossians 2:8:** *"See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ."*

This challenges the acceptance of all philosophies and ideologies, emphasizing the centrality of Christ.

8. **Matthew 28:18-20:** *"Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"*

This challenges relativism and affirms the universal authority of Christ.

Questions for apologists to ask postmodernists

1. **How do you define truth in a postmodern context?** Understanding their perspective on truth as relative, subjective, or socially constructed lays the groundwork for discussing beliefs and worldviews.
2. **Do you see any value in exploring questions of meaning and spirituality in a postmodern framework?** By acknowledging the importance of personal narratives and diverse perspectives, you can find common ground for meaningful dialogue.
3. **How do you navigate the tension between cultural relativism and moral convictions?** Exploring how they reconcile personal beliefs with broader cultural norms can lead to discussions about the nature of morality and ethical frameworks.
4. **What role does spirituality or existential inquiry play in your life?** Encouraging reflection on personal experiences of meaning and purpose can open avenues for discussing spiritual questions within a postmodern framework.
5. **How do you approach the concept of faith in a world characterized by scepticism and doubt?** By acknowledging their scepticism and exploring the nature of faith as a subjective and experiential phenomenon, you can foster understanding and dialogue.

6. **Are there aspects of religious or spiritual traditions that resonate with you despite your postmodern perspective?** Identifying points of resonance can provide opportunities to explore shared values and beliefs.
7. **How do you view the relationship between individual autonomy and communal belonging in matters of faith and belief?** Discussing the tension between individual freedom and communal identity can shed light on their perspective on religion and spirituality.
8. **Have you encountered any challenges or contradictions within your postmodern worldview?** Encouraging reflection on internal tensions or inconsistencies can prompt deeper inquiry and self-examination.
9. **What possibilities do you see for dialogue and mutual understanding between different worldviews in a postmodern context?** Exploring avenues for respectful dialogue and engagement can foster a spirit of openness and collaboration.
10. **Are there any questions or doubts about your worldview that you find particularly challenging or unresolved?** Inviting reflection on areas of uncertainty or doubt can create opportunities for genuine dialogue and exploration.

Reflection Questions and Assignments

1. Agnosticism Reflection Questions:

1. How do you personally define faith, and how does this definition influence your views on agnosticism?
2. Can you identify moments in your life where you felt a need to seek out a higher power or deeper meaning? How did you respond to these moments?
3. How do you interpret the concept of reward and punishment as described in Romans 2:6-8 in relation to your beliefs about morality and the existence of God?
4. How does the idea that God can be found by those who earnestly seek Him (Jeremiah 29:13) resonate with your own search for truth?
5. Reflect on a time when you felt a sense of awe or wonder about the universe. How did this experience shape your thoughts on the possibility of a higher power?

2. Postmodernism Reflection Questions:

1. How does the idea that "truth is socially constructed" (relativism) influence your daily decisions and interactions with others?
2. In what ways do you find comfort or discomfort in the postmodern emphasis on complexity and ambiguity?
3. How do you reconcile the postmodern critique of metanarratives with the Bible's grand narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration?
4. How do you perceive the relationship between individual autonomy and communal belonging in your faith journey?

5. How do you understand the concept of Jesus as "the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6) in the context of a worldview that embraces multiple truths?

Assignments

1. Research Paper: Agnosticism and Biblical Responses

- Write a 5-7 page research paper exploring the different forms of agnosticism (Agnostic Theism, Agnostic Atheism, Strong Agnosticism, Weak Agnosticism, Practical Agnosticism, Existential Agnosticism, Aesthetic Agnosticism, Ignosticism) and analyze how specific Bible verses challenge these views. Include reflections on how these biblical responses could be practically applied in conversations with agnostics.

2. Group Presentation: Postmodernism and Christian Worldview

- Form a group of 3-4 members and prepare a 15-minute presentation on the postmodern worldview. Address key characteristics such as relativism, scepticism towards metanarratives, fragmentation, pluralism, hyperreality, and the interplay of power and discourse. Conclude with how the Christian worldview responds to these characteristics using the provided biblical references. Each group member should present a specific aspect of the topic.

3. Creative Project: Exploring Truth through Art

- Create a piece of art (painting, sculpture, digital art, poetry, etc.) that reflects the tension between the postmodern view of truth as relative and the biblical assertion of Jesus as "the way, the truth, and the life." Write a 2-page artist statement explaining your piece, how it captures the essence of this tension, and what message you hope to convey to the viewer about the nature of truth.