

The Faces of Unbelief and Scepticism

In this message I would like to categorize various forms of unbelief and scepticism towards Christianity. I also aim to demonstrate that the Bible has something to say about each of these states. We will focus on atheism. Next week I will explore other forms of unbelief such as agnosticism and the postmodern worldview. After that we will look at the Afrocentric idea that Christianity is a western religion. It is important for us to be grounded in scriptures and know what we believe and why as we begin to engage with society.

Atheism

I have outlined for you different perspectives on a continuum. It is important to know what you are dealing with so that you don't engage with an agnostic as though they are an atheist.

Strong Atheism: Strong atheism asserts that no gods or deities exist. It makes a positive claim that there are no gods. **Weak Atheism:** Agnostic atheists often hold that the existence of gods is unlikely but not necessarily impossible. **Implicit Atheism:** Implicit atheism refers to individuals who have never considered the concept of gods or deities and therefore lack belief by default. Babies, for example, would fall into this category or perhaps people who have never had the concept of deities explained to them. **Explicit Atheism:** Explicit atheism involves a conscious rejection of belief in gods or deities after considering the concept. **Antitheism:** Antitheism goes beyond mere disbelief in gods and actively opposes organized religion or the concept of a deity. Antitheists often view religion as harmful to society. **Apatheism:** Apatheism refers to a lack of interest or concern regarding the existence of gods. Apatheists may not actively believe in gods but also don't engage in discussions or debates about the topic. They lack the enthusiasm to discuss these issues, unlike most atheists. This is quite dangerous, because ignoring something and being nonchalant about it still has consequences. **Humanistic Atheism:** Humanistic atheism emphasizes human values, ethics, and reason without the need for supernatural beliefs. Humanistic atheists prioritize human welfare and well-being in their worldview. **Naturalistic Atheism:** Naturalistic atheism posits that the natural world is all that exists and rejects supernatural explanations for phenomena. Naturalistic atheists adhere strictly to scientific methods and reject supernatural or metaphysical claims. These atheists see science as God. They speak of God gaps and highlight that religion will gradually decline as we grow in scientific explanations for everything.

It's important to note that some branches of atheism embrace spirituality. This is a type of spirituality that does not acknowledge a deity. These are outlined below:

Spiritual Atheism: Some atheists adopt spiritual practices or beliefs that don't involve gods or deities. They may explore concepts like consciousness, interconnectedness, or transcendental experiences without attributing them to a divine source. **Atheistic Paganism or Neo-Paganism:** Certain pagan or neo-pagan belief systems don't require belief in gods, and some atheists may find resonance with their rituals, symbolism, or reverence for nature. **New Age Beliefs:** New Age spirituality often incorporates elements of mysticism, energy healing, or paranormal phenomena. While many New Age practitioners may believe in a higher power, some atheists within this movement focus more on personal growth, alternative medicine, or holistic wellness practices. **Parapsychology and Psi Phenomena:** Parapsychology is the study of mental phenomena that are inexplicable by orthodox scientific psychology. Atheists with an interest in parapsychology or psi phenomena may explore topics such as

telepathy, hypnosis, precognition (supernormal knowledge of future events), or psychokinesis without necessarily attributing them to supernatural causes. They might see it as just the power of the mind. Some are into transcendental meditation and altered states of consciousness. Psychokinesis, often abbreviated as PK, is a term used in parapsychology to describe the purported ability of the mind to influence physical objects or events without the use of physical means. Also known as telekinesis, psychokinesis suggests that individuals can manipulate objects or exert force on them solely through the power of the mind. This is a good starting point for conversations with spiritual atheists. You can attempt to explain to them that the things they are experiencing often point to the supernatural, darkness or light. **Secular Humanistic Spirituality:** Some atheists embrace a form of secular spirituality that emphasizes humanistic values, interconnectedness, or awe-inspiring experiences derived from nature, art, or music. While they may find value in these experiences, they don't attribute them to divine intervention.

What is the Biblical response to atheism?

1. **Psalm 14:1:** "*The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good.*"

Atheists need to be shown the consequences of life without God and the logical end of it.

2. **Psalm 10:4:** "*In his pride the wicked man does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.*"

When dealing with atheism there is often a root of pride one encounters. The atheist must be encouraged to at least be a weak agnostic who is open to seeing the other side. This helps them to shift to being a seeker.

3. **Romans 1:20-21:** "*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 people 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.*"

The atheist needs to understand the cosmological argument that the existence of God is made plain in creation.

4. **Romans 1:28:** "*Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.*"

Prayer and sometimes warfare is often required when ministering to atheists. This is because their minds have been besieged by the enemy. You are not engaged in merely an intellectual discussion. There are questions you can ask them to challenge them at a heart level. Were they hurt by the Church? Is there unforgiveness that has resulted in a hardened heart?

5. **2 Peter 3:3:** "*Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires.*"

You are not a victim. They are not doing it to you they are doing it for themselves because they are following their evil desires. The apologist mustn't take things personally. You can feel mocked or ridiculed. They may treat you like you are the foolish one. Remember these scriptures. You are not the only one.

6. **John 3:18:** "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

Remain compassionate toward them being aware of their current spiritual state. Remember that God's heart towards them is that He created them and desires them to come to a place of repentance. **2 Peter 3:9 (NIV):** "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

7. **Jeremiah 5:12:** "They have lied about the Lord; they said, 'He will do nothing! No harm will come to us; we will never see sword or famine.'"

Sometimes atheists have slipped into a state of denial about possible judgement and consequences. Appeal to their conscience. Do they really believe He will do nothing? Do they really believe that there will be no judgement? Do they really think that the wicked will get away with murder in this life and the next? **John 3:36:** "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them."

8. **Job 21:14:** "Yet they say to God, 'Leave us alone! We have no desire to know your ways.'"

Remember that they are not rejecting you. They have already rejected God. Explore why they want to be left alone by God if they don't believe He exists. Why do they react emotionally to Christians if they don't believe? As you engage with atheists try to observe and look at the subconversations. **You can even ask them why they get triggered so much by something that apparently doesn't exist.**

9. **Proverbs 1:7:** "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction."

See if you can get them to a place of reverence and somewhat fearing of God. Pray strong prayers with regards to this. This will open them up to God's wisdom. Sometimes God allows people to go through some form of brokenness and after that they are more open. When atheists experience crises they can be more open. When they come to the end of themselves, they can be more open.

10. **Isaiah 45:9:** "Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker, those who are nothing but potsherds among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, 'What are you making?' Does your work say, 'The potter has no hands'?"

11. **Romans 3:10-12:** "As it is written: 'There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.'"

12. **Ephesians 2:12:** "Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, **without hope and without God in the world.**"

Ask them what gives them hope in a world without God. What makes life meaningful for them?

13. 1 Corinthians 1:18-19: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.'"

Your explanations might come across as foolish to them, but remember that the Bible says this is how it will seem. **Apologetics is not about sounding clever or outsmarting someone else.**

Incisive Questions to ask Atheists.

I have learned that great leaders don't have all the answers, they have mastered the art of asking the right questions.

- 1. What, if anything, would convince you that God exists?**
- 2. How do you define morality and where do you believe it originates?**
- 3. Can you explain how the universe came into existence without a creator?**
- 4. Do you believe that human consciousness and intelligence have purely material origins, or do you see room for something beyond the physical?**
- 5. What is your response to the argument from design, particularly the intricacies of biological systems?**
- 6. How do you reconcile the existence of evil and suffering in the world with your worldview?**
- 7. Do you think the concept of objective truth exists, and if so, how do you ground it without a transcendent source?**
- 8. Can you articulate the basis of your belief in the absence of a deity, and what led you to that conclusion?**
- 9. Are there any aspects of religious experience or spirituality that you find compelling, even if you don't attribute them to a divine source?**
- 10. How do you find meaning and purpose in life without reference to a higher power or ultimate reality?**

Reflection Questions

Reflection Questions:

1. How do the various forms of atheism outlined here challenge your understanding of belief and unbelief?
2. In what ways do you see the different branches of atheism manifesting in society today?
3. Consider the biblical passages provided in response to atheism. How do they inform your approach to engaging with atheists?
4. Reflect on the notion of pride within atheism. How might addressing this root issue impact conversations with atheists?

5. What strategies can be employed to challenge apatheism, particularly considering its nonchalant approach to discussions about the existence of gods?
6. Explore the concept of secular humanistic spirituality. How does this intersect with atheism, and what implications does it have for dialogue between atheists and believers?
7. How can believers maintain compassion and understanding towards atheists while still upholding biblical truths about belief and unbelief?
8. Reflect on the idea of atheists rejecting God rather than individuals. How might this perspective shape your interactions with atheists?
9. Consider the role of the fear of God in the atheist's journey towards belief. How can believers approach conversations with atheists in a way that leverages this fear of God and the general sense of justice we all have?
10. Reflect on the biblical perspective on wisdom and instruction in light of engaging with atheists. How might this influence your approach to apologetics and dialogue?

Assignments:

1. Research and write a comparative analysis of different atheistic perspectives, including strong atheism, weak atheism, and antitheism. Explore how these perspectives differ in their rejection of belief in gods and their attitudes towards organized religion.
2. Develop a presentation outlining key biblical responses to atheism, drawing from the provided passages and additional research. Include strategies for engaging with atheists based on biblical principles and insights.
3. Create a discussion guide for a small group or classroom setting, focusing on incisive questions to ask atheists. Provide explanations and biblical references to support each question, encouraging participants to engage in thoughtful reflection and discussion.