

The Christian Atheist #1

Introduction. Christian Atheism is a fast-spreading spiritual pandemic which can poison, sicken, and even kill eternally. Yet Christian Atheism is extremely difficult to recognize — especially by those who are infected. As we will see in these two lessons, there are a multitude of ways to believe in God, yet live as though He does not exist. If the fool has said in his heart that God does not exist (Psalm 14:1), then would it be any better for the one who lives like He does not exist? I am praying that today will be a sobering examination that will diagnose this problem and offer recommendations for its cure.

I. When You Believe In God But Do Not Really Know Him

- A. A recent Gallup poll reported that 94 percent of Americans claim to believe in God or a universal spirit. However, a quick glance at scripture and our culture makes it plainly obvious that nowhere near 94 percent actually know God.
- B. Belief is not the same as personal knowledge. Even the demons believe in God (James 2:19). A lot of people believe in God but they only know about Him, and unfortunately, they know very little about that. For many people, the idea that you could know God on a relational level seems unrealistic and unattainable.
- C. But this is the kind of knowledge that God promises when we seek Him (Deuteronomy 4:29; Jeremiah 29:13; Matthew 7:7-8; Acts 17:27). Under the Old Covenant, no one could have a full knowledge of God, but now in Christ we do have that full knowledge (John 8:19; Hebrews 8:11).
- D. The experience of really knowing God creates a deeper longing for even more intimate knowledge of Him. Truly knowing God completely consumes me and makes me zealously want to do His commandments (John 8:55; 1 John 2:3-4).
- E. No matter what I feel, I hold the assurance that God never leaves me, and He will not leave you (Psalm 63:1-4). If you do not know Him, you can. If you used to be close, you can be close again. Walking with God will break the power of worldliness in your life. You can find Him in your Bible; He has been there all along.

II. When You Believe In God But Are Ashamed Of Your Past

- A. When I think of shame for past sins, I think of the sinful woman in Luke 7:37-38. When we are consumed with shame about the past, belief cannot evolve into a deep relationship with God.
- B. Sadly, a lot of people are dying slowly in a secret tomb of shame. Some are ashamed of their poor financial condition, plagued with guilt about their irresponsible spending and debt. Others are ashamed about sexual sin from their past or what they are currently doing and hiding. When our past pain becomes our present identity, shame has claimed yet another victim. Life is nothing more than a constant reminder of unhealed pain.
- C. It is possible, by the grace of God, to escape shame, no matter how uniquely and irreversibly crippling that person's shame might feel.
 1. Peter broke out of his prison of shame, although his process was tough. A rooster's crow forced Peter to face his shame and failure (Matthew 26:69-75).

2. Yet Peter refused to believe the lie that his betrayal forever branded him a traitor. Broken and repentant, Peter was accepted back into the fold of Christ's disciples. It was Christ who started the conversation that would lead to Peter's new commission (John 21:15-19). This gave Peter a renewed passion and the courage to preach a daring sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36, 40).
- D. We need to accept what cannot be changed and repent (Psalm 51:1-2, 10-12). We can do right from that point forward. While we may always remember what happened, the only shame we must avoid is the shame produced when we deny Him (Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; cp. 1 John 2:28).

III. When You Believe In God But Are Not Sure He Loves You

- A. We do not necessarily question whether God can or does love people. We can easily believe that God loves other people; we just cannot comprehend how or why He would love us. The closer we get to God, the more we realize just how far we fall short (Job 42:5-6; 1 Corinthians 15:9).
- B. When Christian Atheists look at the world — famine, drought, epidemics, war, poverty, terrorism — they wonder how God could care about people as insignificant as we are. Great people in the Bible battled insignificance (Exodus 3:11; Judges 6:15-16; 1 Chronicles 29:14). We are in good company if we feel we are not important enough.
- C. God is love (1 John 4:8), which means He will not pick and choose whom He loves (Psalm 139:13; Luke 15:20; Romans 5:8). No matter what you have done, God's love and forgiveness are bigger than your sins if you will repent (James 5:20; 1 John 1:9).
- D. Not only does God's love cover our sins — God's love makes us significant as sons of God. While others may love you today and abandon you tomorrow, God's love never changes (Jeremiah 31:3). And because of that, you will always be a valuable, significant Christian (Romans 8:38-39; 1 Peter 2:5, 9-10). Dare to claim the truth of John 3:16. God loves you because He is love. That makes you who you are: beloved.

IV. When You Believe In God But Not In Prayer

- A. There are probably a lot of us who feel insecure praying out loud. Maybe we do not think they are long enough, eloquent enough, or powerful enough. Perhaps we do not want to bother God or we do not think our prayers can actually make a difference.
- B. For a Christian, prayer must become the heartbeat of all you do. When prayer becomes an empty, meaningless ritual, it is boring. But when you remember that you are addressing the God of the Universe and that He wants to hear from you, your attitude can change toward prayer. Prayer with the Father can become exhilarating.
- C. The prayers of godly people recorded in scripture are examples of straightforward honesty (Jonah 2:1-9). When they were afraid, when they doubted, when they were angry, etc., they told God and begged His help.
- D. God wants us to pray continually to Him (1 Thessalonians 5:17-18; cp. 1 Samuel 1:10, 12-13; Luke 18:1-5). The more often we pray, the more our daily lives will be infused with the consciousness of God, and the closer we will grow to Him. Frequent, honest prayer opens our hearts and minds to God and will make Satan flee (James 4:7-8).

- E. Our motives matter in prayer (Proverbs 16:2; James 4:3). Our lives matter in prayer (Psalm 34:15; James 5:16). Our faith matters in prayer (James 1:6-7; 1 John 5:14-15). However, remember that God knows what we need more than we do. This may result in prayers that seemingly are unanswered. If anyone should have had prayer answered, it should have been the apostle Paul, yet he did not (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).

V. When You Believe In God But Do Not Think He Is Fair

- A. If God is fair, then why do the unrighteous seem to prosper so often, even as the faithful are suffering? Why does not God do something about all the injustices in the world? Unanswered pain spills all over the pages of the Bible. God allowed Satan to devastate Job (Job 1:13-19; 2:7-8). In the New Testament, God gave John the Baptist the task of preparing the way for Jesus. He lost his life standing for truth (Matthew 14:1-12).
- B. For some reason, it is human nature to place blame. So when we do not understand these deep mysteries about suffering, some are tempted to discredit God completely.
1. I do not have to understand everything to believe something. God has the ability to do something beautiful in our pain (1 Peter 1:6-7).
 2. But just because God can use what happens does not mean He causes everything. He may allow it, but He does not cause it (Hebrews 12:7-11; cp. Luke 13:16).
 3. In one sense, we should be unbelievably grateful that God is not fair (Psalm 103:10-12; Romans 6:23a). God blots out our sins, even though we do not deserve it (Isaiah 43:25).
- C. When we are hurting and confused, there are a couple of truths about God to remember. First, God cares for each one of us (Exodus 34:6; Matthew 9:36). Second, He comforts us in our pain (Psalm 28:7; Isaiah 49:13).

VI. When You Believe In God But Will Not Forgive

- A. You may have tremendous bitterness because of some betrayal (child abuse, gossip, etc.). You may be convinced that feeling bitter hatred is right. Bitterness is frighteningly easy to justify: "Since I have been wronged, I have a right to feel this way."
- B. The root of bitterness can grow in the soil of hurt that has not been dealt with properly (Hebrews 12:15). Love keeps no record of wrongs, but bitterness keeps detailed accounts. If you do not pull a weed out with its roots, the weed will return. Bitterness is the same (Ephesians 4:31-32).
- C. Christians can find in the gospel the sheer strength to battle through the feelings of anger, hatred, and bitterness, and forgive those who seek forgiveness. Your heart can be softened by blessing those who curse you (Luke 6:28). Praying for your enemies over time will change you. It will make you a different person, and it will lead to your sins being forgiven (Matthew 6:14-15).
- D. Your decision to forgive your enemies has to be based on your choice to obey scripture, not a decision based on whether you feel like forgiving (Colossians 3:13). Nothing in you may feel like forgiving, but you can still make the choice to try.

Conclusion. Charles Blondin was a world-renowned tightrope artist and acrobat. On June 30, 1859, before a crowd of 100,000 onlookers, Blondin was the first person to cross Niagara Falls by tightrope. He crossed 1,100 feet on a single three-inch hemp cord, strung from 160 feet above the falls on one side to a spot 270 feet above the falls on the other. He crossed Niagara Falls a number of times thereafter, always with different theatrical variations, including pushing a wheelbarrow. Would you have gotten in the wheelbarrow?

For a lot of Christians, their relationship with God has always been one of belief, but not really one of trust. They know God can fulfill His promises, but they are not sure He would do it for them. The selfish Christian Atheist view is that God exists for them, not them for God and His glory. Anytime God did not meet their expectations, they were tempted to fall away. God is created in their image. If He is not what they want, then He cannot have their total obedience. We have shown, though, that there is a better way, and we will continue examining the ways in which we become Christian Atheists tonight.

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