

## The Christian Atheist #2

**Introduction.** Was there a time in your life that you were closer to God than you are today? Chances are your spiritual drift did not happen on purpose. Like a tiny leak in a tire, slowly but surely, your spiritual passion quietly slipped away.

Instead of a fully devoted follower of Christ, you have unintentionally become a full-time mom or full-time student or a full-time bank teller — and a part-time follower of Christ. Perhaps like many other well-meaning Christians, you know what God wants you to do, but you still do whatever you want. In our journey to rid ourselves of Christian Atheism, we need to look at six more ways in which we can believe in God, but live as though He did not exist.

### ***I. When You Believe In God But Do Not Think You Can Change***

- A. Many Christian Atheists live year after year under the illusion that they cannot change and overcome their sins. They may reason that this is the way God made them. This is their thorn in the flesh.
- B. Maybe you are addicted to alcohol or tobacco. Maybe you are struggling with cursing, gambling, pornography, or evil thoughts. Maybe you work too hard and neglect your wife and children. Addictions and compulsions are idolatry because we are trying to meet some need that only Christ can (cp. Romans 6:14; 2 Corinthians 10:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 1:9).
- C. When Jesus was explaining how difficult it is for a rich man to enter Heaven, His disciples were shocked. With people, change may be difficult, but not with God (Mark 10:27; cp. Acts 3:19). God is bigger than our problems, no matter what they are. Your strength is limited. Your willpower is not bottomless. Your determination will eventually run dry. You need the gospel's power (Colossians 1:29).
- D. Before you tap into the life-changing power of the gospel, you have to eliminate the excuses (2 Corinthians 10:5). The paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda was offered the opportunity to see God's power, but he had grown so accustomed to his condition that he was focused on all the reasons he would never get better (John 5:6-7).
- E. Too many Christian Atheists give up hope. Repentance sometimes will not take all the strength you have — sometimes it will take more. You need God's power. When God gave us the gospel, every one of us now have the power, opportunity, and privilege of repenting and turning our lives to God (Acts 5:30-31; 11:18; 2 Timothy 2:25).

### ***II. When You Believe In God But Still Worry All The Time***

- A. Although we may tell people to trust God completely, we may be overwhelmed with worry. I know I am not supposed to worry, but sometimes it is the hardest thought I have ever tried to overcome. Christian Atheists can always find plenty to worry about.
- B. Many of us treat worry like our friend. We do not consciously think or talk about it in that way, of course, but how we live tells a different story. We clutch it to our chests like our favorite stuffed animals from childhood.
- C. When we live by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7), we believe that God has everything under control (Philippians 4:6-7). But if we start to worry, how we live says the opposite. Worry, in essence, is the sin of distrusting the

promises and the power of God (2 Timothy 1:7). Matthew 6:25 refers to every aspect of your life, taken together in total: mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual. Jesus is simply saying do not worry about anything.

- D. But God does give us responsibility, and it takes faith to do everything in dependence on God (Proverbs 9:12). If you will stop worrying and start praying, then the God of peace will be with you. Worry is the result of trying to carry a burden that never belonged on our shoulders in the first place. Is God in control today? You know He is. Then He is in control tomorrow too (Matthew 6:33-34; cp. Proverbs 3:5-6; Jeremiah 29:11).

### ***III. When You Believe In God But Pursue Happiness At Any Cost***

- A. If something could make me happy, it is easy to believe that it must be what God wants me to do. While it is true that God wants to bless you, we venture into dangerous territory when we start to believe that God's ultimate plan for us is our happiness.
  - 1. God does not exist to serve us. To the Christian Atheist, the God of the Universe is quietly transformed into a cosmic soda machine.
  - 2. If we give enough money, or pray the right prayer, or live the right way, God must deliver and do what we ask.
- B. Pursing happiness seems right but what seems right may not always be right (Proverbs 14:12). When we believe our pursuit of happiness gives us license to sin, we become Christian Atheists. Sin can be pleasurable for a short time (Hebrews 11:25), but it always catches up with you.
- C. God does not want us to be happy when our happiness is based on the world (1 John 2:17). Our temporary pursuit of happiness through materialism is doomed to fail because it is based on a lie. Our culture has conditioned us to believe that what we do not have is exactly what will make us happy (Ecclesiastes 2:4-11).
- D. God does not want us to be happy — He wants us to be blessed. The blessings of God transcend everything this world offers (Psalm 112:1). We cannot be satisfied with what is in the world because we are not made for this world (Hebrews 11:13; 1 Peter 2:11). We were made to dwell with the Lord in Heaven (Philippians 3:20). Real happiness is found in the Lord, and when we find it, perhaps for the first time we will understand how blessed we are (Psalm 97:12).

### ***IV. When You Believe In God But Trust More In Money***

- A. Not having enough money has been a lifelong worry for me. When it comes to money, it is easy to trust God when the stakes are low. But when the stakes get high, it is tempting to trust in money (cp. Luke 12:34). The reason money is such a struggle for us is that it is clearly the number one competitor for our hearts (1 Timothy 6:10; cp. Luke 16:13).
- B. Jesus challenged an intelligent, well-educated rich young man to choose his master (Matthew 19:21-22). After the young man had left, Jesus continued the conversation with His disciples (Matthew 19:23-24).
  - 1. Most of us wake up in the morning dreaming of how we can make more money, rather than how to give more to the Lord.
  - 2. More than half the people on Earth live on less than two dollars a day in conditions of incredible squalor and hardship. The reality is that most of us are filthy rich.

3. But we do not feel rich so we want more of what is crippling us spiritually. We are doubling down on the sickness instead of looking for the cure.
- C. Another encounter Jesus had with a rich man turned out differently. Zacchaeus was despised by everyone who knew him because he was a tax collector for the Roman government (Luke 19:1-10). Without prompting, Zacchaeus, with a spirit of repentance, was willing to give to the poor. His actions show how his heart had suddenly changed. Once he met Jesus, money no longer mattered to him.
- D. Obeying Jesus produces contentment (1 Timothy 6:17). True freedom can be found when we, who have everything, give to those who have nothing (Mark 12:41-44; cp. Galatians 6:10; James 1:27). In so doing, we will be blessed (2 Corinthians 9:8-11).

#### ***V. When You Believe In God But Do Not Share Your Faith***

- A. Sharing the gospel is one of the most fulfilling tasks of a Christian. Christian Atheists know they should teach the gospel but because of the strong emotions associated with it (skepticism, resentment, fear, anger, etc.), they usually do not.
- B. Many people do not want to be pushy or disliked. Many feel that they do not know enough. Many do not teach others because they really do not believe in Hell.
  1. Less than half of the American public believe in Hell but opinion polls do not determine reality. Hell is a place of endless suffering (Matthew 5:29; Revelation 14:10-11).
  2. Be honest. When was the last time you were so burdened for someone far from God that you spent time praying on their behalf?
- C. Always be ready to give an answer for your faith (1 Peter 3:15). Invite someone to a gospel meeting or worship assembly (John 4:28-29). Tell someone what Christ and His gospel has done for you (John 9:25).

#### ***VI. When You Believe In God But Not In His Church***

- A. There are a lot of people who believe they can be better Christians without the church than they can with the church. So for most people, Sunday is just another weekday or even a workday.
  1. Perhaps that is the problem. To many people, church is a place. It is a building with bricks and mortar. It is a destination. We go to church.
  2. The problem with "we go to church" is that it gives us a consumer mindset: "I'm looking for a church that meets my needs. I need a good church that will help me."
- B. The church does not exist for us. We are the church, and we exist for each other and the world (1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Romans 12:4-8).
  1. God is not calling us to go to church; He is calling us to be His church. He wants us to be spiritual sacrifices to Him through His church (Acts 2:42).
  2. The church needs me, whether I feel like I need it or not. Every Christian has a talent or talents, and can fulfill a role within the church. The early Christians made many sacrifices to become a close knit group of saints (Acts 4:34-35). Those saints were accountable and responsible to each other (Hebrews 10:24).
- C. The church at its best is the people who compose it changing others' lives for the good through their example (Philippians 2:15), evangelism (Acts 8:4),

and good works (Acts 9:36-39). Imagine what is possible if you stop going to church and start being the church.

**Conclusion.** There are three levels of faith of which each person is capable. The first is that you believe in God and the gospel of Christ enough to benefit from it. The second is that you believe in God and the gospel of Christ enough to contribute comfortably. The third is that you believe in God and the gospel of Christ enough to give your life for it. Can you be crucified with Christ? Nothing in this world should be more important to you than your treasure in Heaven. The world will try to pull you down to the second level and even down to first level. You need to weigh your options. Life as it is — or life as it could be. Consider the costs, climb up to the top level, and embrace true devotion.

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