

FAITH & FREEDOM

LESSON 9: NEW ATHEISM

Introduction

We live in tumultuous and rapidly changing times. We might with King David ask the question, "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Psalm 11:3) I submit there are a number of things the righteous can do. We need a Biblical understanding of the events we are witnessing and the evolution of prevalent ideologies. We need to not be distracted from God's mission for us during these last days. We need to stand on the front lines and not sit on the sidelines in silence.

New Atheism

There is nothing truly "new" about atheism, in the sense that it has been around throughout human history. The phrase "new atheism" was coined by journalist Gary Wolf in 2006 to describe a new breed of 21st century atheists that believe theism must be aggressively challenged. Probably the four most famous new atheists (the so-called "Four Horsemen") are Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens (deceased), and Daniel Dennett.

1. **Atheism:** Many atheists argue that the term "atheism" means the lack of a belief in a god, not an affirmative belief in the non-existence of any god. This argument is made to suggest they hold a non-position so that they have no burden to prove anything. It is the theist that carries the burden of proof.
2. **How popular is atheism?:** In the United States, those claiming atheism is very low (5% or less), but many claiming to believe in "god" may simply mean belief in an unseen force. In Europe the statistics are much higher (usually as high as 30%) and in many nations almost all claim atheism. Probably 25% or more of the world claims atheism. (See Psalm 14:1; Romans 1:18-32)
3. **Back to the beginning:** Remember that Satan introduced humanism in Genesis 3, and it is that radical theology that attacks the **foundations** God established in the Bible.
 - humanism → naturalism → Darwinism (on naturalism, "The cosmos is all there is, all there was, and all there will ever be." — Carl Sagan)
 - humanism → naturalism → atheism
4. **New Atheism:** The purpose is to legitimize atheism with a fog / veneer of reason to aggressively attack **foundations**:
 - leading advocates are highly educated **but not driving in their lanes**, trying to brand atheism has intellectually reasoned
 - appeal to science (e.g., Darwinism, neuroscience)
 - rhetoric over reason, lots of "straw man" arguments
 - lack of scholarship, ignoring Christian scholarship
5. **Traditional Christian arguments:** The traditional Christian arguments for theism are the ontological argument, cosmological argument, teleological argument, moral conscience argument, and arguments based on the veracity of the Bible.
6. **The Problem of Evil:** This is atheism's proverbial silver bullet. If God is all powerful and all loving, why does evil persist?
 - Christians need to wrestle not only with the evils of humanity, but natural disasters and death of innocents any cause
 - Christians need to be clear on what questions the Bible answers and what questions it does not
 - Christian responses should include that (1) the argument is circular and "steals from God" in order to ask the question, (2) evil and suffering are necessary to provide genuine volition, (3) the Bible points to God's solution to the problem, and (4) atheism provides no hope.

For an excellent analysis of the “new atheism” arguments and response to those arguments, see Ravi Zacharias, *The End of Reason*. Other good resources are listed below.

John Lennox, *Gunning for God*.

John Lennox, *God and Stephen Hawking*.

Norman Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith To Be An Atheist*.

Frank Turek, *Stealing from God*.

For a good book on a Christian response to a crumbling culture, see Francis Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto*.

For a good book on the teleological argument, see Hugh Ross, *Why The Universe Is The Way It Is*. For a more general book on arguments for theism, see William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (3rd edition).

What is the cosmological argument for theism? Here is the short version adapted from William Lane Craig:

Premise one: Whatever begins to exist has a cause. Things don't come into being from nothing.

Premise two: The universe began to exist. There's good philosophical and scientific evidence that the universe is not eternal in the past, but had a beginning. And from that, it follows,

Conclusion: Therefore, a cause of the universe exists.

What is the ontological argument for theism? There are many versions of this ancient argument, but here is one quoted from William Lane Craig's website:

“The ontological argument goes something like this: God is, by definition, the greatest conceivable being. Now, what would the greatest conceivable being be like? Well, he would be omnipotent, he would be omniscient, he would be all-good, and he would be necessary in his existence—he would exist in all possible worlds.

Now, if such a being is possible, that means that a being like that exists in some possible world. But you see, if a being of that nature exists in even one possible world, then it exists in all of them, because that's part of what it means to be the greatest conceivable being. But if it exists in all of them, then it exists in the actual world. Therefore, God exists.”