

ATHEISTS ARE MADE, NOT BORN - The Biblical Psychology of Modern Atheism - Part three

Teaching #1925 - Sunday, October 23rd, 2016 - 6:00 p.m.

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HOW ATHEISTS EXPLAIN RELIGION - AND WHY THEY'RE RIGHT - BUT NOT THE WAY THEY THINK

While not the *only* argument used by atheists, certainly one of the most commonly expressed is *religion is the invention of people unable to cope with the harshness of nature and life in this world as it actually is.*

Here are the words of *Sigmund Freud* in "*The Future of an Illusion*" - "*There are the elements, which seem to mock at all human control: the earth, which quakes and is torn apart and buries all human life and its works; water, which deluges and drowns everything in a turmoil; storms, which blow everything before them....With these forces nature rises up against us, majestic, cruel and inexorable; she brings to our mind once more our weakness and helplessness....*"

Bertrand Russell gave the same explanation for religion in different words in "*Why I Am Not A Christian*" - "*Religion is based, I think, primarily and mainly upon fear. It is partly the terror of the unknown and partly, as I have said, the wish to feel that you have a kind of elder brother who will stand by you in all your troubles and disputes. Fear is the basis of the whole thing - fear of the mysterious, fear of defeat, fear of death....*"

So, the argument goes, we don't know how to cope with a random, harsh, real world. We don't want to feel helpless and we don't want to feel alone. And so we create the idea of God. There is someone out there who cares - perhaps even hears our prayers. We *need* help to cope with life and religion is the easy way out.

Then, usually, comes the theory of how these primitive religious feelings and myths evolve. They morph from their primitive form of naming stars and fires and winds - treating them as actual personalities - into more developed religions with many different gods working and hiding behind these natural events, finally reaching the highest form, the belief in one personal God - perhaps one who created and even controls the material realm around us.

I want to look carefully at the thinking behind this most common of all arguments used by atheists. And I want to because I think they inadvertently give *endorsement* to the Biblical account of religion in general. But before doing that something needs to be said just by way of introduction.

These statements - and there are hundreds just like them - actually have nothing whatsoever to do with the existence of God. They don't even engage with the issue of whether God is or is not. By that I mean the whole approach of all such arguing is skewed from the beginning. This argument simply *assumes* there is no *God* and proceeds to explain the *origin of religion*. The argument simply says, "*If there is no God, this is how religion came to be.*" Which is fine and fun as far as mental gymnastics go, but has nothing whatsoever to do with proving or disproving the existence of God.

Clearly, the idea that mankind has invented religion out of a *desire* for God only carries logical weight if there is some universal law that *absolutely anything people desire cannot exist*. So far, I know of no such law and there is a mountain of evidence to the opposite. Enough said on that point.

Where I want to go with this teaching tonight is to investigate what these atheists actually *do* say about where

religion comes from. Because there is a sense in which they are totally and obviously mistaken and there is **another** sense in which they speak more truth than I'm sure they even know.

1) **THE DESPERATION OF ATHEISM IS REVEALED IN THE CONTRADICTIONARY ARGUMENTS USED TO BAN GOD**

I don't mean to repeat the past teachings but we need to be reminded about those prominent bus and taxi signs sponsored by the **Humanist Society** and **Richard Dawkins** and other supporters in 2009. Signs all over London read, ***"There's Probably No God. Now Stop Worrying and Enjoy Your Life."***

I'm confused. Here God is the **Trouble Maker**. He's the one **removing** comfort and joy from life. He's the one - if the signs' words have any meaning at all - who is the **source** of the **worry** people experience. This is made abundantly clear by the admonition to **stop worrying** because God probably doesn't exist. Get God out of the picture and we can relax.

Enter Freud and Russell and the picture changes. This is a troubled world. There are things we fear. There are things we **worry** about. We need comfort. So what do we do? If only there was a God! So we invent God. And this invented God eases the fear and the worry.

Now any reasonable person might want to ask, ***"Which is it? Is God the Trouble Maker? Or is He the Soother? In one atheist's claim God causes the worry. In another atheist's claim God relieves the worry. Can we please make up our minds? One is left with the impression you can pick any side you want, just so long as you send God packing. The facts aren't the important part. Just the desired result."***

And the reason this matters is the very nature of these arguments reveals the truth from last week's teaching that **sin affects cognition**. The desperate and contradictory nature of these different arguments reveals a **prejudice** (the Scriptures call it a **"blindness"**) that hijacks even brilliant intelligence.

The big point here is simple, yet profoundly important. These arguments are not a **threat** to God's Word. They are an **endorsement** of it's diagnosis of the human situation.

2) **FREUD AND RUSSELL ARE ABSOLUTELY RIGHT IN ONE ASPECT OF THEIR ANALYSIS OF THE ORIGIN OF RELIGION**

Romans 1:21-23 - ***"For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [22] Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things."***

What Paul is describing is the **invention of religion**. And it is **close** to what Sigmund Freud and Bertrand Russell imagine. Close, but not quite. Truly mankind **does** invent religion to escape what he finds fearful and discomfoting. No argument with these atheists on that point.

But what mankind fears isn't **nature**. What he fears is **God**. Religion exists because mankind needs an escape route. He has a huge problem, and Paul has already described it in this same first chapter of

Romans:

Romans 1:18-20 - "**For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven** against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. [19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So **they are without excuse.**"

These atheists are "***without excuse.***" If only they ***had*** an excuse for their rejection of God they would be fine. They would be able to escape God's coming wrath. But they ***have*** no excuse. And that leaves these vulnerable God-rejecters only one option.

They do exactly as Freud and Russell state. They ***invent*** their own religions. All sorts of religions. Any will do to help hide from the true God. Here's the history of religious invention - **Romans 1:22-23** - "**Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.**"

Those words are clear enough. But what ***needs*** to be said is this is the exact ***opposite*** order of events from our atheists's description. This is not the account of the ***evolution*** of religion, rising up from primitive nature religions to a more evolved religion with one almighty, Creator God.

No. The exact opposite is the case. Romans one describes in vivid, accurate detail, the ***devolution of religion*** from the revelation of our Creator God to the desperate attempts of man-made comfort religions designed to ***avoid*** Him.

This is what is insisted on in the words of **Romans 1:23**. At the heart of mankind's rebellion is more than ***ignorance***. Ignorance would leave us all with an excuse. No. It's not ***ignorance***. It's the willing choice of an ***exchange*** - "**...and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.**"

God-rejecters ***trade*** the truth of God away. Freud is wrong. Every idol stands not as a tribute to a ***wishful fervor for God*** but as a ***monument to the flight of man from the true knowledge of God.***

3) **THERE IS A KIND OF GOD PEOPLE INVENT AND A KIND OF GOD THAT MUST BE REVEALED**

On December 14th, 1950 C.S. **Lewis** wrote a letter to the then ***non-Christian Sheldon Vanauken***. Vanauken, whose wife had just begun reading Lewis' books, was concerned he wasn't just considering Christianity because of some inner wish fulfillment that it be true. Lewis writes to help him with his inner fear. Lewis' words are fascinating:

"My own position at the threshold of Christianity was exactly the opposite of yours. You wish it were true: I strongly hoped it was not....What I think you can say with certainty is this; the notion that everyone would like Christianity to be true, and that therefore all atheists are brave men who have accepted the defeat of all their deepest desires, is simply impudent nonsense. Do you think people like Stalin, Hitler, Haldane....would be pleased on waking up one morning to find that they were not their own masters, that they had a Master and Judge, that there was nothing even in the deepest recesses of their thoughts about which they could say to Him 'Keep out. Private. This is my business? "

Their first reaction would be (as mine was) rage and terror. And I doubt very much whether even you would find it simply pleasant....So let's wash out all the 'wish' business. It never helped anyone to solve any problem yet.

Lewis is only confirming what the Bible has always taught - **Romans 1:22-23** - **“Claiming to be wise, they became fools, [23] and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.”**

We create gods who are somewhat like us - ***“...resembling mortal man...”*** In fact, we ***make*** these gods precisely to ***hide*** from the holy, just, sovereign God who created us. But this is not the ***evolution*** of religion. It's the proof of our unavoidable accountability before the true God. It's the desperate flight of those who inwardly know they are ***“without excuse”*** before a self-revealing God. More on this next week.