

Sunday, October 9th, 2016 - 6:00 p.m.

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"I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God, and, naturally, hope that I'm right about my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that." - Atheist Philosopher, Thomas Nagel in "The Last Word."

This quote is unique only for its **honesty**. Nagel expresses the kind of **push-back** in his heart that isn't admitted by most modern atheists. I say this push-back isn't **admitted** in the modern atheists. But it is **evident**. There is an **anger** that makes no sense being directed against the **non-existent God** in the modern atheist's words.

Listen to this rant from **Richard Dawkins** in his book, **"The God Delusion"** - He describes God as **"...a petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal** (filicide is the act of killing one's son or daughter. God killed His own Son), **pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."**

Now that's a lot of adjectives to apply to a non-existent entity. There's clearly more going on here than a cool analytical examination. And listen as Dawkins describes how passionately he doesn't **want** to accept any kind of **theistic origin** of our universe in a **National Public Radio interview**:

"If it were ever shown that life on this planet was designed....then I would say....it must have been some extraterrestrial intelligence, perhaps following Francis Crick's....suggestion of 'directed panspermia'....that life might have been seeded on Earth in the nosecone of a rocket sent from a distant civilization that wanted to spread its form of life around the universe."

Of course, both the U.S. and Canada are free countries. If you don't want to believe in God you don't **have** to. But here is a highly educated man telling us all that **even if he were shown evidence** that the only possible explanation for our present universe was **intelligent design** - **"....If it were ever shown...."** - **don't overlook those words** - if it **were** shown that the only explanation for our universe was that of **intelligent design**, Dawkins has **already decided** to go with **little green men (or sperm) in a space ship** if the only other choice is **God**. This from the man who calls people who believe in God **delusional**.

Now, here's the question that simply must be addressed. I can understand the person - even if I don't **agree** with that person - I can **understand** the person who says he simply can't find any evidence for belief in God. And that person, I assume, **would** become a **theist** if there were actual evidence presented that made belief in God impossible to deny. So far, so good.

But what makes Dawkins say **"even if he were shown evidence this planet was designed"** the only option he would have to explain this design would be little green men from a spaceship? Why is it his foregone conclusion that this would be the **only** option he would accept? Why **couldn't** there be at least a tiny slice of room for an intelligent Creator God if it were proven this universe was **intelligently designed**?

And it's suddenly obvious to any thinking person that **Dawkins**, though in less forthright, honest words, is stating the same position as atheist philosopher **Thomas Nagel**, quoted at the beginning of this teaching: **"It isn't just that I don't believe in God, and, naturally, hope that I'm right about my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that."**

The point I want to unpack for at least the next four weeks is simple to state. What I want to express is this. There is more going on in the denial of God than intellectual fact processing. In both the statements of modern atheists (which are secondary) and in the clear analysis of the divine revelation of the Scriptures (which is primary) there is always a **moral component** to atheism.

I don't mean by **moral component** that atheists are all **outwardly wicked**. I don't suppose **atheists** are any more outwardly what we'd call **bad** people any more than **theists** are outwardly **bad** people. But what **I do** mean is there is a **prejudice** of heart that leaves all atheists **less objectively unbiased** in their rejection of God than perhaps even **they** are always aware of.

Only God's Word can shine the light of truth into this dark area of the human heart. Because we are all **participants** in what the Bible calls the **"suppression"** of divine light we are in the poorest position to examine this darkness without divine revelation. This will be

the study of future weeks.

And the reason this matters so much is virtually *all* atheists either *believe*, or at the very least, want *you* to believe, they are atheists because this is where the facts lead. They would have you believe they are the *objective* seekers of truth. You and I, so they would say, are caught up in some inward *need to believe* (We'll examine this in detail in future weeks). They, on the other hand, follow the cool, detached methodology of science and reason.

1) **BEFORE CONSIDERING THE ROOT OF ATHEISM WE MUST EXAMINE THE TWO COMMONLY STATED ARGUMENTS USED TO DENY GOD'S EXISTENCE**

Almost all atheists root their conviction in the two most commonly held arguments against God's existence - *the problem of evil* and *naturalism proven by science*. Neither of these is the theme of this series, but we need to at least touch on these most widely taken paths toward the rejection of God.

- a) ***"The world is filled with suffering and evil. If God were all loving He would want to end it. If God were all powerful He would be able to end it. But He hasn't ended it. Therefore there is no all powerful, all loving God."***

While you could bury the earth in books on what is commonly known as the *problem of evil* and the study of *theodicy*, this argument actually has almost nothing to do with the existence of God. It certainly addresses the *nature* and *character* such a God may possess, but says literally nothing about whether a God does or doesn't exist.

Even so, the fact that this is such a widely debated area of thought *by itself* points to the *existence* of God and the existence of a *good* God. It also points toward the work of God as *Creator*.

Consider this. Whether the issue is addressed by a devout Christian or a passionate atheist, the concern is the same for each. Something is perceived as being *wrong* with our world. And this is so obvious it's taken as an absolute - a given. That's why everyone thinking about it has a name for it. We call it the *problem* of evil.

Evil, we call it. And there's a bunch of it. All you have to do is look around. It's why novelist *Fyodor Dostoevsky* declared, *"...the earth is soaked from its crust to its center with the tears of humanity."*

Now the question is, *is this universal observation of the evil and pain of our world an accident? Or is it a revelation of divine love?* After all, to say there is a problem of *evil* is to say things are not as they *ought* to be. But how can the atheist possibly say that? From whence this new *value* assessment?

If there is no God - if evil just is what *is* - how should anyone have ever discovered anything as *evil*? Do fish swim around complaining about being wet? Do the blind from birth complain about the dark?

Truly, the *Christian* has the right to complain about evil. Evil, if I can put it this way, makes *sense* for the Christian. This Fallen world is evil precisely because it is now the *opposite* of the *good God who created it*. Creation has a *moral footing*. There is a logical *context* for both *experiencing* suffering and evil and also *recognizing and explaining* evil as it actually is. Evil is a *recognizable* and *definable* reality - a *distortion* and *perversion* of an actually existing, creating, morally good God.

So not only does the atheist have no moral ground for *complaining* about evil. He has no moral ground for even *recognizing* evil.

On to the second most common form of argument against God's existence:

- b) ***"Reality is what is knowable through the senses. Truth is found in reason and science. God can't be proven through science. Therefore there is no evidence for His existence."***

These are the roots of *naturalism* (the belief that the world of nature is all there is - no God, angels, human souls, spirits, eternal life, etc.) and *positivism* (the belief that the empirical evidence gathered through the senses is the road to all there is to know - all that actually exists. God, of course, doesn't fit in here.).

But here too there are problems for the atheist. If logical positivism is true then it has to be false because the statement, **“all there is to know must come through the evidence gathered by the senses”** can't be examined under any microscope. It can't be proven in any laboratory. In short, the notion that all beliefs must be scientifically verifiable **isn't** scientifically verifiable.

All of this creates a system of belief no atheist can consistently live with. What must be held as convictions in the mind are tremendously hard to live out in God's world. Here is just one final example. Consider these words - these bleak words - again from **Richard Dawkins in “River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life”**:

“The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference....DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is. And we dance to the music.”

Like it or not, that is, at least, an honest assessment of **naturalism**. That is all there is. But no one lives as though this were even close to the reality we know in our hearts - **including Dawkins!**

Don't forget these scathing words of firey rage against the wickedness of God - that God was, **“...a petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.”**

But why these complaints? From whence this rage? And where on earth did all these **morally packed criticisms** come from? Surely DNA has no such strong claim to the moral realm. Whatever happened to whatever is just **is**. No feelings. No emotions. And why isn't Dawkins just **“dancing to the music?”**

No. There's something else at work here, and it will be the theme of the next four teachings. I just want to peel back the very first layer of those future teachings in this closing point:

2) **THE BIBLICAL MESSAGE IS THERE IS A MORAL DIMENSION TO THE DEPARTURE FROM FAITH IN GOD**

Psalm 14:1 - **“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good.”**

Romans 1:18 - **“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.”**

This is the consistent Biblical witness. It is a completely modern trend to think of those who don't believe as **seekers** of truth. But this is not the Biblical witness. With much more spirit-directed terminology they are called **suppressors** of truth. In one of the teachings in this series we will study carefully in what sense can the Biblical meaning be understood that calls unbelievers **“enemies”** of God - **“...if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God....”** How are they enemies? Are they **all** enemies? How does this condition **manifest** itself?

For now just note that the atheist speaks primarily to his or her own heart before speaking anywhere else - **Psalm 14:1** - **“The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good.”**

And note also the second, much less quoted, portion of that single verse. It is no coincidence that the self-declaration of unbelief flows out of the moral condition of the heart.

It takes no deep theological insight to see the link between the Psalmist's words and the Apostle Paul's. It is first and foremost the condition of the heart that prejudices the heart against the truth of God. A **blind spot** is created and nourished.

The point for our wrap-up can be briefly put. Apart from divine revelation **the human mind does not neutrally observe the world**. We all need to remember this because the neutral high-ground is precisely the claim atheists make.

Much more on this in weeks to come.