

#1923 - Sunday, October 16th, 2016 - 6:00 p.m.

Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

THE COGNITIVE CORRUPTION CAUSED BY SIN

It was January 2009 when buses and taxis all over London began to roll along those British streets carrying signs that read, ***“There’s Probably No God. Now Stop Worrying and Enjoy Your Life.”*** The ***British Humanist Association*** and ***Richard Dawkins*** and other organizers raised over 140,000 pounds to cover the expenses.

Those signs need to be carefully analyzed. Notice the link - intentional or otherwise - between ***denying God’s existence*** and ***enjoying life***. Acknowledging the ***reality of God***, on the other hand, is said to promote only one thing - ***worry*** - ***“There probably is no God. Now stop worrying (that’s what you get when you believe in God) and enjoy your life”*** (enjoyment is the fruit of denying God’s existence). So ***God*** equals ***worry***. ***Atheism*** equals ***fun***.

Of course, the posters leave us to connect the dots, but I can only imagine the ***worry*** from the ***theist*** side comes from some sort of ***consequence of God’s judgment when we don’t live properly***. And the ***fun*** of ***atheism*** is the consequence of ***doing whatever you want without God looking over your shoulder***. I guess it has its own twisted kind of logic once you get rid of God.

The underlying message I want to unfold from those posters can be further exposed by the forthright words of some very prominent atheists. And the logic is exactly the same as those tacky street signs in London. This point matters and is the main point for tonight’s teaching.

Consider these words from a man, considered by scholars, as one of the grand-daddies of modern atheism - ***Aldous Huxley***. He is one of the most famous atheists of all time:

“For myself as, no doubt, for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was simultaneously liberation from a certain political and economic system and liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom....Most ignorance is vincible ignorance. We don’t know because we don’t want to know. It is our will that decides how and upon what subjects we shall use our intelligence. Those who detect no meaning in the world generally do so because, for one reason or another, it suits their books that the world should be meaningless.” - ***Aldous Huxley in “Ends and Means”***

Note the similar words of another prominent atheist, author and educator, ***Mortimer Adler*** who, in speaking of his rejection of religious commitment said he did so because it ***“...would require a radical change in my way of life, a basic alteration in the direction of day-to-day choices as well as in the ultimate objectives to be sought or hoped for....The simple truth of the matter is that I did not wish to live up to being a genuinely religious person.”***

Fortunately, unlike ***Huxley***, ***Adler*** found he couldn’t live with his own cognitive hypocrisy and converted to Christ at the age of 81.

But here’s the interesting point from all of these words. Both those famous bus signs and those words from those two prominent atheists are ***their own explanation of their atheism***. These aren’t the judgment of Christians as to why atheists hold the convictions they hold. These are atheists ***telling us*** why they hold the convictions they hold. And they hold their convictions, according to their own words, because theism would ***cramp their style***. And, according to their own words, the style it would cramp is their ***moral*** style.

Huxley’s words are unmistakably clear - “...We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom....Most ignorance is vincible ignorance. We don’t know because we don’t want to know.”

Take careful note of that last sentence - **"We don't know because we don't want to know."** Don't know **what?** Clearly Huxley means **"don't know God."** There's no other possible context for those words. And they reveal the heart of the Biblical psychology of modern atheism. The atheist's ignorance of God isn't rooted in the **mind**. It may well indeed **reach** the mind as a fabricated conviction and be sincerely held eventually. But the atheist's ignorance of God is rooted in the atheist's **will**. He or she would **rather not** acknowledge God.

I don't mean to wear this thought out, but it **is** the heart of tonight's study. Look again at the words we've already studied from another atheist philosopher, **Thomas Nagel** in **"The Last Word"** - **"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."**

Again, when **Nagel** says, **"...I don't want the universe to be like that..."** what does he mean? He doesn't want the universe to be like **what?** What is he afraid of? Or, to put it in the words of those bus signs in London, what about God's existence is he **worried** about? And the answer for Nagel is the same as it is for the others. He doesn't **want** to be inhabiting a universe with moral absolutes and governance. He doesn't want any divine restrictions.

So the single pattern running like the line down the center of the highway of atheism is this. In spite of the **impression** many have of the intellectual honesty and courage of modern atheism, at its roots it resides more in a **will** opposed to God than a **mind** unable to locate Him. And the reason for all of these introductory remarks is to show that many **atheists themselves admit this moral motive for their atheistic convictions.**

This lengthy introduction leads me to putting these three points together:

1) **THE BIBLE TEACHES THERE IS A DIRECT CONNECTION BETWEEN MORAL AMBITION AND COGNITIVE FUNCTION**

Sin affects ideas. Please understand what I **am** saying and what I am **not** saying. Certainly there is no questioning the intellectual brilliance of many atheists. Some are highly and seriously educated. Just as are many **theists**. So education and I.Q. aren't under debate here.

When I say the Bible teaches a connection between **moral ambition** and **cognitive function** I mean sin affects, not the intelligence, but the **way in which that intelligence is directed**. The Bible says sin causes even great intelligence to be **biased**.

We Christians shouldn't find this a hard concept to accept. We all **know** what it's like to have our **mind** know something is true while even our **redeemed will** pulls us in the opposite direction of the truth we know in our heads. Which Christian, with a renewed mind no less, doesn't still find his heart **"prone to wander,"** as the old hymn says? Who among us isn't still drawn away from God to material gain, pride of position, the approval of our peers, embracing bitterness against our enemies, and so on?

And if this is **our** experience having God as our Father it should be no reach to see that a mind completely at **"enmity with God,"** as the apostle Paul says, will find all sorts of intellectual reasons to deny God's existence. This is what we should **expect** in someone committed to life on his or her own moral terms.

Here's the Biblical rationale for what we all know to be true already:

Ephesians 4:17-19 - **"Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. [18] They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. [19] They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity."**

Notice, their understanding isn't *removed*. It's not that they've lost the capacity to reason. They're still intelligent. But that intelligence is now *darkened*. It's a *dark* kind of reasoning. It's a brilliantly argued *prejudice*. They use their intelligence to fortify their "*alienation*" (18) from God. They use their reasoning to "*futile*" ends - "*...in the futility of their minds....*" (17).

2) **WHILE IT IS TRUE THAT BELIEFS SHAPE ACTIONS, IT IS MORE DEEPLY TRUE THAT ACTIONS - ESPECIALLY REPEATED ACTIONS - AFFECT BELIEFS**

Look again at *Aldous Huxley's* telling words - "*For myself as, no doubt, for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was simultaneously liberation from a certain political and economic system and liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom.... Most ignorance is invincible ignorance. We don't know because we don't want to know. It is our will that decides how and upon what subjects we shall use our intelligence.*"

Now, with those words still in your mind, drill down deeply into these truth-declaring words of our Lord in **John 3:19-21** - "**And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. [20] For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. [21] But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.**"

Here we have our Lord's exegesis of the atheist's heart. We shouldn't be surprised that honest atheists like Huxley, Adler, Nagel, and others are actually inwardly forced to confess them. Such is the power of divine truth.

The main point in Jesus' words is atheism (and indeed *all* rejection of divine light) is rooted in the *will* rather than the mind. It's all bound up with what people *love and hate* far more than what they *think*. Indeed, the end product of their thoughts, however sincerely held, is merely the *fruit* of the will and affections.

I've just been recently re-reading some old books I have by the brilliant philosopher/theologian *Soren Kierkegaard*. I'm not recommending his books to anyone. But I love his words on the subject of atheism in "*Works of Love*":

"People try to persuade us that the objections against Christianity spring from doubt. That is a complete misunderstanding. The objections against Christianity spring from insubordination, the dislike of obedience, rebellion against all authority. As a result people have hitherto been beating the air in their struggle against objections, because they have fought intellectually with doubt instead of fighting morally with rebellion."

3) **THERE'S A REASON THE ATHEIST FREQUENTLY ISN'T AWARE OF HIS OR HER OWN BIASED CONDITION**

There's a movie I've never seen but have frequently heard discussed called "*The Sixth Sense*." From what I've heard and read of the story it has to do with child psychologist *Malcolm Crowe* who tries to help a small boy, *Cole Star*, who is somewhat tormented by ghosts. "*I see dead people,*" is the famous line in all the commercials.

Malcolm doesn't believe Cole at first, but eventually the boy's words prove true. But the surprise ending is the story turns out to be as much about Malcolm, the psychologist, as the boy, Cole. And the reason is it turns out Malcolm himself is a ghost, He's already dead and doesn't know it yet. Which is quite a bummer. And the rest of the story unfolds as Malcolm comes to terms with the reality of his own deceased state.

Just a dumb movie, for sure. But it proves a perfect illustration of what we're studying tonight. *Dead* but *unaware* of it. It is not an exaggeration to say this is the condition of every person born into this world. Original sin means we are all "*conceived in sin.*" And not just in some unimportant manner. This is more than religious

lingo.

The worst aspect of this actual condition is it prevents people from knowing they are spiritually dead. In other words, spiritual deadness is not a condition we can self-diagnose. Spiritual deadness affects **cognition and self diagnosis**. It affects the way we reason without diminishing intelligence. It both **creates** a prejudice against God and removes the **awareness** of its own blindness at the same time. We begin to attribute to the **mind** what is actually a problem of the **will**. And the only ones unaware of this deception are those caught up in the bias of unbelief by rejecting the moral demands of divine truth.

I close with a verse we're going to consider carefully in future weeks:

Romans 1:28 - **"And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done."**

Notice, they **"did not see fit to acknowledge God..."** Look at how the old King James bluntly puts those opening words - **"...they did not like to retain God in their knowledge..."**

That's it exactly. Notice, it's not that God wasn't a **worthy subject** of knowledge. It's not that He was **unknowable**. It's that He wasn't **"retained"**. He was not **allowed** in the mind. This, at least initially, was a **choice**. Those denying Him **chose** to eliminate God. God didn't **fit in** with the way they wanted to shape their minds. It's not that they didn't know God was there. It's that He didn't fit in. And they didn't want to adjust. There are the moral roots of a biased, self-ruled world view. And for Christians who know their Bibles there's nothing shocking about the bold claims of modern atheism.

The closing application to all of us in this room is to remember two things. **First, you will not always be successful arguing atheists into faith and that shouldn't totally surprise you**. This is not a reflection on the weakness of your faith. It is the first obvious result of the truthfulness of the Bible's revelation of the visible effects of sin on the fallen mind, however brilliant that mind may be in other areas.

And **second, we all need the constant reminder of the eroding effects of sin on even our renewed minds**. There are **other** effects of sin besides **guilt**. Cherished sin corrodes spiritual thinking. It makes any specific sin look smaller than it actually is - less dangerous - easier to justify. And the eternal effects of choosing to not **"retain"** God in any single area of life diminishes faith in **all** areas of life eventually. Take this very seriously. Repent quickly, deeply, and frequently.