

Challenging the New Atheists

The new wave of bitterly anti-God, anti-Christian atheists offer arguments against God. Patrick Zukeran provides several good answers.

The New Atheist Agenda

Nearly thirty years ago John Lennon sang the song, "Imagine." The words went like this:



"Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Living for today
Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too

Imagine all the people
Living life in peace
Imagine there's no heaven. . .
You may say that I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one

In other words, the source of much evil in the world is religion: belief in God, life after death, and a universal moral code. Would the world be a better place if faith in God was eliminated? Many atheists now think so. Richard Dawkins states, "Imagine with John Lennon, a world with no religion.

Imagine, no suicide bombers, no 9/11, no 7/7, no Crusades, no witch-hunts, no Gunpowder Plot, no Indian partition, no Israeli/Palestinian wars, no Serb/Croat/Muslim massacres, no persecution of Jews as 'Christ killers', no Northern Ireland 'troubles', no honour killings', no shiny-suited bouffant-haired televangelists fleecing gullible people of their money ('God wants you to give till it hurts'). Imagine no Taliban to blow up ancient statues, no public beheadings of blasphemers, no flogging of female skin for the crime of showing one inch of it."[\[1\]](#) The goal of the new atheists is to rid the world of belief in God or religion and replace it with reason and science. The new atheists believe that religions that embrace a belief in God, particularly Christianity, are not just irrational but dangerous and therefore must be extinguished.

The new atheists are not presenting new arguments but instead they are promoting their ideas very aggressively with strong, confrontational, and condemning language. They have gained a following amongst the young academic crowd, and they have been quite influential in public education. Some of the notable names who have written popular work include Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Dan Barker, and Christopher Hitchens.

In this work we will cover four popular arguments presented by the new atheists. The first is that belief in God is irrational. The second argument is that Christianity in particular is dangerous. Third, science has clearly proven God does not exist. Fourth, religion is the result of a natural man-made evolutionary process motivated by man's need for a divine father figure and the need to find meaning in the universe.

In this series, we will examine these arguments and see whether belief in God is irrational or if there are good reasons for belief in a creator.

Belief in God is Irrational

The new atheists allege that faith in God is the result of irrational thinking and that a rational person would not believe in God. Sam Harris writes, "We have names for people who have many beliefs for which there is no rational justification. When their beliefs are extremely common we call them 'religious'; otherwise they are likely to be called 'mad,' psychotic,' or 'delusional.'" [\[2\]](#)

Richard Dawkins, in his book *The God Delusion*, says that belief in God is the result of delusional thinking. He asserts that belief in God is a delusion built on empty assertions and not evidence. He states, "Faith is blind trust, in the absence of evidence, even in the teeth of evidence." [\[3\]](#) His conclusion is that there is no evidence to support the existence of God; in fact, all the evidence goes against God.

The assertion that belief in God is irrational is not a new argument but a very old one. It is true that many who believe in God are not able to present reasons why they believe. However, Christianity is not founded on "blind faith" but faith built upon evidence, and there are good reasons that make belief in God a reasonable conclusion. One significant individual who has come to believe in the existence of God is Antony Flew. Flew was this generation's greatest atheist philosopher. However, Flew, through philosophical reasoning, came to believe in God.

Flew states that he wrestled with three key, major scientific questions. First, how did the laws of nature come to be? Second, how did life come from non-life? Third, how did the universe come into existence? [\[4\]](#) The naturalists' answers, which are heavily dependent on Darwin's theory, were unsatisfactory. Flew discovered that the classical theistic arguments provided the best answers in light of the evidence. The [cosmological argument](#), or argument from first cause, and the [teleological argument](#), or argument from design, provided a

much more reasonable answer.[{5}](#)

For centuries, Christian apologists have presented these and several [other reasoned arguments](#) for the existence of God and many have come to a belief in God as Flew did. Antony Flew's conversion from atheism to theism deals a devastating blow to the arguments of the new atheists. Not only was he a titan among atheist philosophers, but he is another example that demonstrates belief in God is not irrational. Reasoning individuals who are willing to study the evidence and follow it wherever it leads may find a strong case for a creator.

Is Science at War with God?

The new atheists allege that science and faith are at war. Therefore real scientists must be atheists, for science clearly proves God does not exist.

How do these atheists explain the display of design in the universe? Leading atheist spokesman Richard Dawkins believes Darwin's theory answers the design argument. However, recent discoveries reveal the shortcomings of Darwin's theory. Darwin's theory fails to explain the cause of the universe. It also fails to present evidence that that life came from non-life. There is also the lack of transitional forms in the fossil record, and there is no mechanism for macro-evolutionary change. Mutations and natural selection have failed to conclusively show they can produce macro-evolutionary change. In short, the new atheists have a lot of faith that Darwin's theory will answer these challenges.

Science and the Christian faith are not enemies. In fact, the more scientists study nature and the universe, they continue to discover complexity and design which make it highly improbable such complex systems could have come about by chance or natural forces. For this reason, the number of scientists who are acknowledging an intelligent creator

continues to grow. This is a fact the new atheists neglect to acknowledge.

Francis Collins, the leader of the Human Genome project and author of *The Language of God*, tells how the order and precision in the DNA code led him from atheism to belief in God. Collins writes, "Many will be puzzled by these sentiments, assuming that a rigorous scientist could not also be a believer in a transcendent God. This book aims at dispelling that notion, by arguing that belief in God can be an entirely rational choice, and that the principles of faith are in fact complimentary with the principles of science." [\[6\]](#)

Physicist Stephen Hawking states that his study of the universe reveals that "The overwhelming impression is one of order. The more we discover about the universe, the more we find that it is governed by rational laws. . . . You still have to ask the question why does the universe bother to exist? If you like, you can define God to be the answer to the question." [\[7\]](#)

Francis Collins and Stephen Hawking are just two examples of numerous award-winning scientists who acknowledge the scientific evidence points to a creator. The more we learn in the various fields of science such as biology, microbiology, astronomy, physics, etc., the evidence continues to point to design. The complexity of life and the order displayed in the universe make it more reasonable to conclude a God created it, and the greater leap of faith would be to conclude it all occurred by chance and natural forces.

Belief in God Is Dangerous

The new atheist movement asserts that religion is dangerous, for it is the source of much of the conflict in the world today. Many assert that religions, especially Christianity, teach intolerance and discrimination. To build their case,

however, the new atheists unfortunately attack misrepresentations of religions, especially Christianity.

For example, in *The God Delusion*, Richard Dawkins states, "The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser, a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully."[\[8\]](#) What Dawkins displays is his superficial understanding of the Bible. Certainly no Christian believes in a God as described by Dawkins.

Another error is the misuse of labels. New atheists apply the term "fundamentalist" to Evangelical Christians as well as fundamentalist Muslims, creating the illusion the two are equivalent in their teachings. When Dawkins points to the example of the Islamic riots against the Danish cartoons, he equates this incident not with Islam but with religion, all religions.[\[9\]](#) However a careful study reveals that there is a huge difference between Jesus' teachings and Muhammad's teachings. This huge difference is also revealed in the lives they lived.[\[10\]](#) A careful reading of the New Testament quickly reveals that violence goes against the nature of Christ's teachings who taught His disciples to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them (Mt. 5:38-48). Application of the true teachings of Christ would lead to a peaceful society.

New atheists allege that religions promote division by the creation of in-groups and out-groups. Indeed, there are religions that discriminate, including some Christian groups, but in Christianity that is a perversion of the teachings of Christ. Jesus' sacrifice and gift of salvation is offered to all (Jn. 3:16). Throughout His life Jesus reached out to those despised by the culture, and His disciples die—many in foreign fields—preaching salvation to all. Even in the Old Testament,

the mission of Israel was to be a blessing to all the world (Gen. 12). Application of true biblical teachings would lead to non-discrimination.

A significant point that the new atheists do not mention is the destructive consequences of atheist philosophies. Nietzsche predicted that the death of God would lead to a moral relativism which would result in blood in the streets.[\[11\]](#) Communism has led to the death of millions in the twentieth century. Millions were put to death under the regimes of Marx, Pol Pot, and Mao Tse Tung. Some religions are responsible for conflict, including Christians who have misused biblical teachings. However, atheism has shown to be dangerous as well.

Religion Is the Result of an Evolutionary Process

New atheists assert that religion was created out of a need for a father figure, or for comfort in a cruel world, or out of fear of the unknown. They rely on the work of James Frazer and his book the *Golden Bough*, written in the nineteenth century. Frazer taught that religion developed through a natural evolutionary process which began first with animism, a belief in spirits in nature. The worship of nature spirits eventually led to polytheism. Eventually, amongst all the gods, one was viewed as the most dominant. Eventually this dominant god alone was worshipped and monotheism developed. This was known as the evolutionary theory of religion. New atheists believe eventually man's need for God will end and atheism will be the end of this evolutionary development. Unfortunately, the new atheists once again are not presenting a new theory but reiterating an old theory which has been shown to be flawed.

One of the flaws of this theory is that it was influenced by Darwin's theory of evolution and lacked serious empirical

evidence and study.^{12} One of the most significant and well-researched works was produced by anthropologist Dr. Wilhelm Schmidt in his four-thousand-page treatise, *The Origin and Growth of Religion*. His research of hundreds of cultures revealed that monotheism is the oldest of religions. The development of religion was discovered to have gone in the opposite direction of the evolutionary theory. All cultures began with a belief in a heavenly father, and this monotheistic faith eventually degenerates to polytheism and then animism. This theory is called "original monotheism."^{13} The evidence displayed by Schmidt, and later by anthropologist Don Richardson, is consistent with the progression of religion as revealed in Romans 1. Serious research and evidence appears to favor the biblical model.

The new atheists present few new arguments. What are new are not the arguments but the method and strategy of this group. How should we meet the challenge of the new atheists? 1 Peter 3:15 challenges us to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." We are called to love those who question or even attack the Christian faith. Christians must answer their challenges with humility and grace. As we present a well-reasoned case and the evidence, the Holy Spirit will use our apologetic defense and our unshaken but loving attitude to speak to their mind and heart.

Psalm 14:21 states, "The fool says in his heart there is no God." Might it be the new atheists who are irrational?

Notes

1. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2006), 23-4.
2. Sam Harris, *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* (New York: Norton, 2004), 72, quoted in Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 113.

3. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 198.
4. Antony Flew, *There is a God* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2007), 91.
5. Ibid., 89. For more on this, see Gene Herr, "[Case for a Creator](#)," [www.probe.org](#).
6. Dr. Francis Collins, *The Language of God* (Free Press, 2006), 3.
7. Gregory Benford, "Leaping the Abyss: Stephen Hawking on Black Holes, Unified Field Theory and Marilyn Monroe," *Reason* 4.02 (April 2002): 29 quoted in Flew, *There is a God*, 97.
8. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 51.
9. Ibid., 46-50.
10. See Patrick Zukeran, "[The Lives of Muhammad and Jesus](#)," at [www.probe.org](#).
11. Amy Orr-Ewing, *Is Believing in God Irrational?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 208.
12. Alister McGrath and Joanna McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 60.
13. See Patrick Zukeran, "[The Origin of Man's Religions](#)," [www.probe.org](#).

Answering the New Atheists – A Christian Addresses Their Arguments

Kerby Anderson counters the claim by popular new atheists that Christianity (along with other religions) is blind, irrational and without any evidence. Kerby demonstrates that contrary to the atheists' claims God is not an invention of mankind, that faith is not dangerous, and that science and Christianity support one another. From a Christian point of view, the new atheists are bringing out tired old arguments that don't stand up to rational scrutiny.

Is Faith Irrational?

Many of the best selling books over the last few years have been written by the New Atheists. I'd like to consider some of the criticisms brought by these individuals and provide brief answers. You may never meet one of these authors, but you are quite likely to encounter these arguments as you talk with people who are skeptical about Christianity.

✖ For our discussion, we will be using the general outline of the book *Is God Just a Human Invention?* written by Sean McDowell and Jonathan Morrow.[\[1\]](#) I would encourage you to read the book for a fuller discussion not only of the topics considered here but of many others as well.

You cannot read a book by the New Atheists without encountering their claim that religion is blind, irrational, and without any evidence. Richard Dawkins makes his feelings known by the title of one of his books: *The God Delusion*.

Why does he say that? He says religions are not evidentially based: "In all areas except religion, we believe what we

believe as a result of evidence.”{2} In other words, religious faith is a blind faith not based upon evidence like other academic disciplines. So he concludes that religion is a “nonsensical enterprise” that “poisons everything.”{3}

Each of the New Atheists makes a similar statement. Dawkins states that faith is a delusion, a “persistent false belief held in the face of strong contradictory evidence.”{4} Daniel Dennett claims Christians are addicted to blind faith.{5} And Sam Harris argues that “Faith is generally nothing more than the permission religious people give one another to believe things without evidence.”{6}

Is this true? Do religious people have a blind faith? Certainly some religious people exercise blind faith. But is this true of all religions, including Christianity? Of course not. The enormous number of Christian books on topics ranging from apologetics to theology demonstrate that the Christian faith is based upon evidence.

But we might turn the question around on the New Atheists. You say that religious faith is not based upon evidence. What is your evidence for that broad, sweeping statement? Where is the evidence for your belief that faith is blind?

Orthodox Christianity has always emphasized that faith and reason go together. Biblical faith is based upon historical evidence. It is not belief in spite of the evidence, but it is belief because of the evidence.

The Bible, for example, says that Jesus appeared to the disciples and provided “many convincing proofs, appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

Peter appealed to evidence and to eyewitnesses when he preached about Jesus as “a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know” (Acts 2:22).

The Christian faith is not a blind faith. It is a faith based upon evidence. In fact, some authors contend that it takes more faith to be an atheist than to believe in God.[\[7\]](#)

Is God a Human Invention?

Human beings are religious. We are not only talking about people in the past who believe in God. Billions of people today believe in God. Why? The New Atheists have a few explanations for why people believe in God even though they say God does not exist.

One explanation that goes all the way back to Sigmund Freud is projection. He wrote that religious beliefs are “illusions, fulfillments of the oldest, strongest, and most urgent wishes of mankind.”[\[8\]](#) In other words, we project the existence of God based on a human need. It is wish fulfillment. We wish there would be a God, so we assume that he exists.

As Sean McDowell and Jonathan Morrow point out in their book, there are five good reasons to reject this idea. One objection is that Freud’s argument begs the question. In other words, it assumes that there is no God and then merely tries to find an explanation for why someone would believe in God anyway.

The projection theory can also cut both ways. If you argue that humans created God out of a need for security, then you could also just as easily argue that atheists believe there is no God because they want to be free and unencumbered by a Creator who might make moral demands on them.

Perhaps the reasons humans have a desire for the divine is because that is the only thing that will satisfy their spiritual hunger. C.S. Lewis argued that “Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desires: well, there is such a thing as

sex. If I find in myself a desire, which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. Probably earthly pleasures were never made to satisfy it, but only arouse it, to suggest the real thing.”[{9}](#)

Some atheists suggest that perhaps we are genetically wired to believe in God. One example would be the book by Dean Hamer entitled *The God Gene: How Faith is Hardwired into Our Genes*. It is worth noting that even the author thought the title was overstated and at least admitted that there “probably is no single gene.”[{10}](#) Since the publication of the book, its conclusions have been shown to be exaggerated. Francis Collins served as the director of the Human Genome Project and has plainly stated that there is no gene for spirituality.

Richard Dawkins believes that religious ideas might have survived natural selection as “units of cultural inheritance.”[{11}](#) He calls these genetic replicators *memes*. Although he has coined the term, he is also quick to acknowledge that we don’t know what memes are or where they might reside.

One critic said that “Memetics is no more than a cumbersome terminology for saying what everybody knows and that can be more usefully said in the dull terminology of information transfer.”[{12}](#) Alister McGrath perceives a flaw: “Since the meme is not warranted scientifically, we are to conclude that there is a meme for belief in memes? The meme concept then dies the slow death of self-referentiality, in that, if taken seriously, the idea explains itself as much as anything else.”[{13}](#)

There is another explanation that we can find in the Bible. Why do most people believe in a God? The writer of Ecclesiastes (3:11) observes that it is God who has “set eternity in the hearts of men.”

Is Religion Dangerous?

The New Atheists contend that religion is not just false; it's also dangerous. Sam Harris believes it should be treated like slavery and eradicated.[\[14\]](#) Christopher Hitchens wants to rally his fellow atheists against religion: "It has become necessary to know the enemy, and to prepare to fight it."[\[15\]](#) Richard Dawkins is even more specific: "I am attacking God, all gods, anything and everything supernatural, wherever and whenever they have been invented."[\[16\]](#)

Much of the criticism against religion revolves around violence. We do live in a violent world, and religion has often been the reason (or at least the justification) for violent acts. But the New Atheists are kidding themselves if they think that a world without religion would usher in a utopia where there is no longer violence, oppression, or injustice.

Sean McDowell and Jonathan Morrow point out in their book on the New Atheists that details matter when you are examining religion. Injustices by the Taliban in Afghanistan ought not to be used as part of the cumulative cases against religion in general or Christianity in particular. The fact that there are Muslim terrorists in the world today does not mean that all Muslims are dangerous. And it certainly doesn't mean that Christianity is dangerous.

Alister McGrath reminds us that "all ideals—divine, transcendent, human or invented—are capable of being abused. That's just the way human nature is. And that happens to religion as well. Belief in God can be abused, and we need to be very clear, in the first place, that abuse happens, and in the second, that we need to confront and oppose this. But abuse of an ideal does not negate its validity."[\[17\]](#)

Religion is not the problem. People are the problem because they are sinful and live in a fallen world. Keith Ward puts

this in perspective:

No one would deny that there have been religious wars in human history. Catholics have fought Protestants, Sunni Muslims have fought Shi'a Muslims, and Hindus have fought Muslims. However, no one who has studied history could deny that most wars in human history have not been religious. And in the case of those that have been religious, the religious component has usually been associated with some non-religious, social, ethnic, or political component that has exerted a powerful influence on the conflicts.[*{18}*](#)

The New Atheists, however, still want to contend that religion is dangerous while refusing to accept that atheism has been a major reason for death and destruction. If you were to merely look at body count, the three atheistic regimes of the twentieth century (Hitler in Nazi Germany, Stalin in Russia, and Mao in China) are responsible for more than 100 million deaths.

Dinesh D'Souza explains that "Religion-inspired killing simply cannot compete with the murders perpetrated by atheist regimes." Even when you take into account the differences in the world's population, he concludes that "death caused by Christian rulers over a five-hundred-year period amounts to only 1 percent of the deaths caused by Stalin, Hitler, and Mao in the space of a few decades."[*{19}*](#)

Religion is not the problem; people are the problem. And removing religion and God from a society doesn't make it less dangerous. The greatest death toll in history took place in the last century in atheistic societies.

Is the Universe Just Right for Life?

The New Atheists argue that even though the universe looks like it was designed, the laws of science can explain

everything in the universe without God. Richard Dawkins, for example, says that "A universe with a creative superintendent would be a very different kind of universe from one without."[{20}](#)

Scientists have been struck by how the laws that govern the universe are delicately balanced. One scientist used the analogy of a room full of dials (each representing a different physical constant). All of the dials are set perfectly. Move any dial to the left or to the right and you no longer have the universe. Some scientists have even called the universe a "Goldilocks universe" because all of the physical constants are "just right."

British astronomer Fred Hoyle remarked, "A commonsense interpretation of the facts suggests that a super intellect has monkeyed with physics, as well as chemistry and biology, and that there are no blind forces worth speaking about in nature."[{21}](#)

McDowell and Morrow provide a number of examples of the fine tuning of the universe. First is the expansion rate of the universe. "If the balance between gravity and the expansion rate were altered by one part in one million, billion, billion, billion, billion, billion, there would be no galaxies, stars, planets, or life."[{22}](#) Second is the fine tuning of ratio of the electromagnetic force to the gravitational force. That must be balanced to one part in 10 to the 40th power. That is 1 with 40 zeroes following it.

Scientists also realize that planet Earth has extremely rare conditions that allow it to support life at a time when most of the universe is uninhabitable. Consider just these six conditions: (1) Life must be in the right type of galaxy, (2) life must be in the right location in the galaxy, (3) life must have the right type of star, (4) life must have the right relationship to the host star, (5) life needs surrounding planets for protection, and (6) life requires the right type

of moon.[{23}](#)

Scientists (including the New Atheists) are aware of the many fine tuned aspects of the universe. They respond by pointing out that since we could only exist in a fine-tuned universe, we shouldn't be surprised that it is fine tuned. But merely claiming that we could not observe ourselves except in such a universe doesn't really answer the question why we are in one in the first place.

Richard Dawkins admits that there is presently no naturalistic explanation for the fine-tuning of the universe.[{24}](#) But he is quick to add that doesn't argue for the existence of God. And that is certainly true. We know about God and His character from revelation, not from scientific observation and experimentation. But we do see the evidence that the design of the universe implies a Designer.

Are Science and Christianity in Conflict?

The New Atheists believe that science and Christianity are in conflict with one another. They trust science and the scientific method, and therefore reject religion in general and Christianity in particular.

Sam Harris says, "The conflict between religion and science is unavoidable. The success of science often comes at the expense of religious dogma; the maintenance of religious dogma always comes at the expense of science."[{25}](#)

Richard Dawkins believes religion is anti-intellectual. He says: "I am hostile to fundamentalist religion because it actively debauches the scientific enterprise It subverts science and saps the intellect."[{26}](#)

Are science and Christianity at odds with one another? Certainly there have been times in the past when that has been the case. But to only focus on those conflicts is to miss the

larger point that modern science grew out of a Christian world view. In a [previous radio program](#) based upon the book *Origin Science* by Dr. Norman Geisler and me, I explain Christianity's contribution to the rise of modern science.{27}

Sean McDowell and Jonathan Morrow also point out in their book that most scientific pioneers were theists. This includes such notable as Nicolas Copernicus, Robert Boyle, Isaac Newton, Blaise Pascal, Johannes Kepler, Louis Pasteur, Francis Bacon, and Max Planck. Many of these men actually pursued science because of their belief in the Christian God.

Alister McGrath challenges this idea that science and religion are in conflict with one another. He says, "Once upon a time, back in the second half of the nineteenth century, it was certainly possible to believe that science and religion were permanently at war. . . . This is now seen as a hopelessly outmoded historical stereotype that scholarship has totally discredited." {28}

The New Atheists believe they have an answer to this argument. Christopher Hitchens discounts the religious convictions of their scientific pioneers. He argues that belief in God was the only option for a scientist at the time.{29} But if religious believers get no credit for the positive contributions to science (e.g., developing modern science) because "everyone was religious," then why should their negative actions (e.g., atrocities done in the name of religion) discredit them? It is a double standard. The argument actually ignores how a biblical worldview shaped the scientific enterprise.{30}

The arguments of the New Atheists may sound convincing, but once you strip away the hyperbole and false charges, there isn't much left.

If you would like to know how to answer the arguments of the New Atheists, I suggest you visit the Probe Web page at

www.probe.org and also consider getting a copy of the book by Sean McDowell and Jonathan Morrow. You will be able to answer the objections of atheists and be better equipped to defend your faith.

Notes

Is God Just a Human Invention? (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010).

2. Richard Dawkins, "The Faith Trap," 20 March 2010, bit.ly/fFvLLJ.

3. Ibid.

4. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), 28.

5. Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 230-231.

6. Sam Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 110.

7. Norman Geisler and Frank Turek, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004).

8. Sigmund Freud, *The Future of Illusion* (New York: Norton, 1989), 38.

9. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 119-122).

10. Quote of Dean Hamer in Barbara Bradley Hagerty, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 263.

11. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 316.

12. Victor Stenger, *God: The Failed Hypothesis* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2007), 257.

13. David Berlinski, *The Devil's Delusion: Atheism and Its Scientific Pretension* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 26-27.

14. Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 87.

15. Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007), 283.

16. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 36.

17. Alister McGrath, "Challenges from Atheism," in *Beyond*

- Opinion*, ed. Ravi Zacharias (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 31.
18. Keith Ward, *Is Religion Dangerous?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 73.
19. Dinesh D'Souza, *What's So Great About Christianity* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2007), 215.
20. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 78.
21. Quoted in Paul Davies, *The Accidental Universe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 118.
22. Mark Whorton and Hill Roberts, *Holman QuickSource Guide to Understanding Creation* ((Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2008), 308.
23. Sean McDowell, "Is There Any Evidence for God? Physics and Astronomy," *The Apologetics Study Bible for Students*, gen. ed. Sean McDowell (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2010).
24. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 188.
25. Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, 63.
26. Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 321.
27. "Origin Science," www.probe.org/origin-science/.
28. Alister McGrath and Joanna Collicutt McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 46.
29. "The Jewish God, the Christian God, or No God?" Debate between Christopher Hitchens, Dennis Prager, and Dinesh D'Souza, 1 May 2008.
30. Nancy Pearcey and Charles Thaxton, *The Soul of Science* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994).

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On the Death of a God-Hater

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Renowned evangelist for atheism Christopher Hitchens died last week at the end of his battle against cancer. Author of *God Is Not Great*, he knew the end was coming and also knew that many people would speculate about his destiny. As far as we know, he remained persistent in his unbelief and hostility about God, religion, and any concept of the afterlife.

I am one of the many Christians who prayed for him as death approached, knowing full well it would take a miracle for Mr. Hitchens to do a “180” and throw himself on the mercy of a God he has insisted is not there. But then again, no less of a miracle than anyone who was born dead in our trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), since dead people don’t choose life apart from a miracle from God.

As I think about his death, there are two things I know for sure.

First, God is just.

He will not force Himself on someone who refuses Him. He will honor our choices, even if those choices lead to eternal separation from Him. When Jesus was face to face with people who stubbornly said “NO!” to Him, He spoke the blunt truth to them: “Since you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life (Jn. 5 :40), you will die in your sins” (Jn. 8:24). Apart from God Himself, there is no life, there is no truth, there is no light (see John 1). So if people persist in their rebellion against Him, there is no way for them to have life, truth, light. . . or peace. A terrible, terrible predicament for a person that was counting on annihilation and finds himself an eternal soul instead, separated forever from the source of all that makes eternity good, which is God Himself.

Second, God is good. Which also entails Him being full of grace and mercy. Which is why He “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). And which also explains why He proclaims, “I take no pleasure in

the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezek. 33:11).

Even up to the last moment.

If anyone, Christopher Hitchens included, turns to Jesus in faith, even the tiniest amount of faith, like that of a mustard seed, He will save them.

Dr. Russell Moore—teaching pastor, seminary professor, blogger and exceptionally kind man who knows the love of his Father—wrote about Hitchens' death last week in a post called ["Christopher Hitchens Might Be in Heaven."](#) He pointed out that no one can know that Hitchens woke up in hell; God's lovingkindness, expressed through the power of the Gospel, extended salvation up to the man's last breath.

He writes:

"But I'm not sure Christopher Hitchens is in hell right now. It's not because I believe there's a 'second chance' after death for salvation (I don't). It's not because I don't believe in hell or in God's judgment (I do). It's because of a sermon I heard years ago that haunts me to this day, reminding me of the sometimes surprising persistence of the gospel.

"Fifteen or so years ago, I heard an old Welsh pastor preach on Jesus' encounter with the thieves on the cross. The preacher paused to speculate about whether the penitent thief might have had any God-fearing friends or family members. If so, he said, they probably would never have known about the terrorist's final act, his appeal to Jesus, 'Remember me when you come into your kingdom' (Lk. 23:42). They never would have heard Jesus pronounce, 'Today you will be with me in Paradise' (Lk. 23:43).

"These believing family members and friends would have assumed, all their lives, that this robber was in hell,

especially dying as he did under the visible judgment of God (Deut. 21:22-23). They would have been shocked to meet this man in the kingdom of God. 'We thought you were in hell,' they might have said, as they danced around him in the heavenly places."

I know that God is just. I know that God is good. I don't know where Christopher Hitchens is right now; none of us do, including his unbelieving brethren insisting he doesn't exist at all, anywhere, in any plane. But as Russell Moore concludes,

"Hell is real and judgment is certain. The gospel comes with a warning that it will one day be too late. But, as long as there is breath, it is not yet too late. Perhaps Christopher Hitchens, like so many before him, persisted in his rebellion to the horror of the very end. But maybe not. Maybe he stopped his polemics and cried out, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'"

"I don't know. But I do know that the gospel offers forgiveness and mercy right to the edge of death's door. And I know that the kingdom of God is made up of ex-thieves, and ex-murderers, and ex-atheists like us."

Like me. God is good. And He IS great.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/tapestry/sue_bohlin/on_the_death_of_a_god-hater