

Atheists, Agnostics, Deists and Us

Preface note: *This article is written to Christians. If you are an atheist and are reading this, please understand that I mean no disrespect. I do not look down on atheists, especially since I was one myself!*

Recently, Linda and I were with extended family, several of whom are atheist.¹ During the Thanksgiving celebration, my Christian sister directed those attending to say something that they were thankful about, one person at a time. Each person was given a little piece of paper with a very short verse on it (relating to the idea of giving thanks). They were instructed to read the verse and then say something for which they were thankful.

I suspect that some people were a little uncomfortable doing this but overall, it went well. A few of the believers in attendance said things that unbelievers would not say. But they were honest things not intended to proselytize. One of the atheists stated that he has different views than many in attendance but found it good to hear what other people think and feel who do not share his views. I was glad that he had this attitude and that he was not offended by what some of the believers said.

A few minutes later, a female atheist had her sharing opportunity. She seemed a tad uncomfortable as she said that there is no heaven except whatever heaven we can experience here on earth. She let on that her life is full of things that make it like heaven to her.²

Having lived as an atheist in times past, I have some understanding of the mindset. Since the time I first began to follow Jesus, I was amazed at how blind I had been before following Him. Most atheists get very uncomfortable and many get angry if you attempt to explain the gospel to them. I suggest that this is due to the fact that their view does not and cannot rest on empirical fact. They adamantly insist there is no God and therefore no judgment and no heaven. Some of them laugh and mock those who say that God exists. Yet, the atheist who insists there is no God cannot prove He does not exist. It is impossible. So, they resort to insisting that since He cannot be seen, He must therefore not exist.

But what is behind the anger that so many atheists seem to have when you initiate a conversation with them about spiritual things? It is due to the fact that they cannot know for sure that they are correct in their view. So, they must tell themselves that there is no God, no heaven and no judgment.³ They must convince themselves that they are right and we are wrong. They work hard at telling themselves these things. But they don't merely tell themselves these things in their hearts and minds. They also order their lives in such a way so as to substantiate their life view.

This is why so many atheists tend to lead hedonistic lives. If they can jam enough activities that are fun and full of adventure into their lives, then they feel like they are getting the maximum enjoyment out of life. This inoculates them to some degree from the reality that exists throughout the world. Since they are seeing so many wonderful places and doing the things that the world holds out as wonderful, then they can go on assuming that they are experiencing the closest thing they can to what many call heaven. Is it any wonder why God so mercifully turns so many lives upside down? Until people realize that they cannot control their existence in the pleasurable way they hoped, they will remain content telling themselves that there is no God, no heaven and no judgment.

Agnostics⁴ tend to live like atheists. I suppose some credit is due to the atheist for his position. Evidently, he has thought enough about the atheist position to realize the obvious inconsistencies in it. So, the agnostic cleverly takes a position that accomplishes the same result as the atheist position. The agnostic merely claims that he cannot know that there is a God or for that matter, a heaven or judgment.

¹ The word "atheist" is comprised of the word theist with an a tacked on the front of it. Theist comes from the Greek word for God (Theo). So, *a theo* means *no God*. I should also say that I was an atheist until I was the age of 21 and I shared many things in common with these friends and loved ones.

² Later, Linda approached this woman and told her that there is such a place as heaven. The woman replied that while Linda believes this, she did not. Linda told her that when her life takes a major turn, she will change her mind and realize that life on earth is not at all like heaven. The woman told her that when difficulties arise, she does yoga and meditates. Linda said that she prays. The woman said that there really is no difference between what she does (meditating and yoga) and what Linda does when she prays. Then the conversation was cut short by other circumstances but it ended on good terms.

³ I suspect most atheists would object to this statement insisting that they do not do this. I suggest that they are simply not aware that they are doing it. But they must do this because if they discovered they were wrong, their entire house of cards framework would come tumbling down. So, they keep telling themselves they are right even if they don't do it consciously.

⁴ The word agnostic is the word gnostic with an a tacked on the front. The a negates what follows. The word gnostic comes from the Greek word meaning knowledge. So, the agnostic "cannot know." (This is their position.)

Though the agnostic position might help him feel more comfortable, it also does not let the agnostic off the hook. If he is sincere, he must admit that if it is true that he cannot know that there is a God, then it is just as true that he cannot know that He does not exist. After all, according to his position, he cannot know. So, like the atheist, the agnostic is relegated to the practice of telling himself that there is no God and therefore no heaven and no judgment. Like the atheist, he will do what he can to fill his life with things that help convince him that he is in the right. If adventurous vacations are not enough, then accomplishments, career and money can help to fill the void.⁵ If not enough of life's pleasures are experienced, then there is always self-medication using alcohol, drugs, sexual pleasures and the like. It all can help a person distract themselves from the reality that God does indeed exist and that judgment is close at hand.

In the end, the atheist and the agnostic will realize the error of their way.⁶ At the judgment, the blinders will be removed so that they realize that God has been loudly communicating from the beginning that He does indeed exist and that He rightly holds people accountable for their thoughts and actions. *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse (Romans 1:18-20).*

Consider what God has to say about those who claim to be atheist or agnostic. *The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God" (Psalm 14:1).* But so as to not go too hard on my atheist and agnostic friends, I would like to point out that this verse pertains not merely to the atheist and agnostic, it also applies to many, if not most people who claim to be Christian. The verse does not say, *The fool has said out loud, "There is no God."* Rather, the fool says this in his heart and to himself.

Many if not most people who claim to be Christian live as deists.⁷ In the days of the prophets Amos and Zephaniah, there were plenty of religious people. They observed feasts and sang songs. But consider what the Lord thought about their religious practices. *I hate, I reject your festivals, Nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer up to Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them; And I will not even look at the peace offerings of your fatlings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. (Amos 5:21-23).*

Though these people participated in religious observances and even the singing of religious songs, the people lived like deists. They lived as if God did not hold people accountable for their actions and thoughts. *I will punish the men Who are stagnant in spirit, Who say in their hearts, 'The LORD will not do good or evil!' (Zephaniah 1:12).*

The atheist and agnostic strive to convince themselves that there is no God, no heaven and no judgment. But many who claim to be Christian subtly fall into a lifestyle that is very similar. Though they would never proclaim that there is no God with their mouths, they say in their heart that there is no God. They don't consciously think that God does not exist but their lives suggest otherwise. Perhaps we should not label them atheist or agnostic, but surely the title deist seems to fit.

Lastly, I wish to acknowledge that as Christians, we all must strive hard to live the abundant life that Jesus talked about. (See John 10:10.) Our tendency is to become stagnant in spirit. It is only by God's grace that we avoid becoming practical deists or worse, full-fledged atheists. Knowing this about ourselves, we should also strive to be understanding and compassionate with all of our atheist and agnostic friends because God is the only one who deserves the credit for opening our eyes and allowing us to come to know Him personally.

⁵ I should also point out that atheists and agnostics receive some pseudo affirmation through the false assumption that they are in the majority. The media and educational systems spread misinformation continually by giving the impression that most people on earth do not believe God exists. This is a form of peer pressure to make those who do believe in God appear as oddballs. Thus, the atheist and agnostic receive false affirmation that they are in the right and those who believe in God are simply ignorant, poor fools being misled by antiquated belief systems.

⁶ I fully understand that, like them, I also cannot prove my position with empirical data. I don't attempt to do this. But I believe what I believe and what I believe is rooted in my experience of knowing God personally. My experience fully confirms what God has already revealed in His Word, the Bible.

⁷ A deist is a person who acknowledges the existence of God but believes that after creating everything and setting up the laws of the universe, everything continues to operate without His involvement. The deist believes that God is not all that concerned with what goes on and does not hold people accountable for their actions and thoughts.