

If There Is a God, Why Are There Atheists?

Romans 1.18–32

Don Ruhl • Savage Street, Grants Pass, Oregon • May 4, In the year of our Lord, 2014

Scripture Reader and Reading: Gene Tomlinson – Acts 14.13–18

Song Leader and Song Suggestions: Phil Joseph – There Is a God

Prelude:

I. We are so persuaded that God exists

- A. that atheism does not make sense to us.
- B. To discuss God's existence almost seems like a waste of time, because
 - 1. it is so obvious to us.
 - 2. Yet, we know people who truly believe He does not exist.
 - a) *How* can anyone deny His existence?
 - b) *Why* would they deny Him?

II. However, sometimes we practice a form of atheism,

- A. known as practical atheism,
- B. to which Paul referred when writing to Titus,

16 They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work (Tts 1.16).

- 1. Practical atheists proclaim that God exists, but
- 2. they live as though He does not.
 - a) Practical atheists say they believe God, but
 - b) they do not follow what He teaches for living.
 - (1) Practical atheists mock unbelief, nevertheless,
 - (2) they do not read the Book of the Creator of the Universe!

Persuasion:

I. Why Are Atheists Concerned about the Existence of God?

- A. Do they fight belief in Hindu gods or Satan?

B. Does their protesting say something?

1. Thomas Warren debated Anthony Flew, a world-famous atheist.
 - a) During the debate, Flew acknowledged the existence of God, but
 - b) did not like the God of the Bible.
 - (1) Flew has since declared that God does exist, but
 - (2) Flew has not gone all the time and accepted Christianity.
2. What moves many atheists, I believe, is this sentiment,
“If God does not exist, everything is permitted.”

II. The Motive of Atheism

A. Moral and spiritual issues motivate atheists more than intellectual ones.

1. It is not the lack of evidence, no,
2. man has an antipathy toward the nature of God.
 - a) Man does not desire a God like the God of the Bible.
 - b) Man does not desire
 - (1) to find God and to know God, but
 - (2) to deny Him, or to ridicule Him.

B. Romans 1 shows succinctly the problem and motive of atheism,

1. which shows why Paul wanted to preach the Gospel, because

18 the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom 1.18).

- a) The human race marches toward the Day of Judgment
 - (1) when God shall pour out His wrath against
 - (2) everyone who opposes Him, and
 - (a) we do not want anyone to face that danger.

- (b) Therefore, we declare the Good News of salvation.
 - b) Is the wrath of God popular with man?
 - (1) No, however, God does not show wrath arbitrarily.
 - (2) Man's evil provokes God's wrath, and
 - (a) atheists know it.
 - (b) Rather than reform their lives, they deny that He even exists.
 - c) Our text shows what provokes God's wrath.
 - (1) Man's ungodliness, his opposition to God and His majesty.
 - (2) Man's unrighteousness assaults God's righteousness.
 - d) Then Paul declared the basis of atheism,
 - (1) the suppression of truth,
 - (2) the truth
 - (a) of His existence,
 - (b) of our creation,
 - (c) of the consequences of our actions, and
 - (d) of our accountability to Him.
2. Romans 1 next declares that they can know of God,

19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them (Rom 1.19).

- a) The existence of God is not a mystery for an elite group.
- b) God makes Himself plain,

14 “Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14.17).

25 “Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. 26 And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the

face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, 27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us..." (Acts 17.25–27).

- (1) Rain from heaven witnesses of God's existence.
 - (a) Somehow the rain is there for us.
 - (b) The rain gives us fruitful seasons.
 - i) That in turn fills our hearts with food and gladness.
 - ii) Are you not glad
 - (1) that you have food,
 - (2) that comes from fruitful seasons,
 - (3) that comes from heaven-sent rain?
- (2) He gives us life, because
 - (a) life cannot create itself.
 - (b) How did life take in a breath?
 - i) God gives us the air to breathe, and
 - ii) He gave us the ability to breathe in that air, and
 - (1) we breathe out what the fruit needs, and
 - (2) it breathes out what we need.
 - (a) The atheist says that happened by chance.
 - (b) We say it is a coordinated, orchestrated effort.
- (3) All these things testify that God exists!

3. Romans 1 goes on to reveal what we all know to be true,

20 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 (Rom 1.20).

- a) In the New King James Version, Paul said
 - (1) that not only God's existence, but
 - (2) some of His invisible attributes are, "clearly seen."
 - (a) You can observe the creation and
 - (b) after contemplating you can draw some conclusions.

"Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God:
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries,
And daub their natural faces unaware."
– Elizabeth Barrett Browning

- b) Truly, no one can claim ignorance, and
 - (1) that is how it will be in the Judgment, and so
 - (2) we must preach the Good News, because
 - (a) a way exists for these people to escape the Judgment.
 - (b) Acknowledge God and Jesus of Nazareth.
- c) Therefore, when people are not persuaded
 - (1) it is not because of an insufficiency of evidence.
 - (2) It is an insufficiency in man.
 - (a) It is not a natural problem.
 - (b) It is a moral problem.
- d) For that reason, God holds all people accountable, because
 - (1) the problem is not man's composition but
 - (2) his disposition.
- e) Jesus also revealed the problem to Nicodemus,

19 "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. 20 For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not

come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (John 3.19–20).

4. Romans 1 continues and shows the denial and problem of atheists,

21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened (Rom 1.21).

- a) They refuse to honor what they know,
 - (1) revealing the problem, not of ignorance, but
 - (2) of the suppression and repression of the truth.
- b) Men know God, but
 - (1) they care not to acknowledge Him,
 - (2) leading them to absurd reasoning.
 - (a) Their morality dictates their theology rather than
 - (b) their theology dictating their morality.

5. Therefore, Romans 1 gives more insight into their behavior,

22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things (Rom 1.22–23).

- a) “Fools” not in academic sense, for
 - (1) they might be intelligent, but
 - (2) they take that intelligence and say things like:
 - (a) Something came from nothing;
 - (b) Order came from chaos;
 - (c) Life came from non-life; and
 - (d) One form of life turned itself into another form of life.
- b) Psalms 14 reveals more of their motive,

**1 The fool has said in his heart,
“There is no God.”
They are corrupt,
They have done abominable works,
There is none who does good.
(Psa 14.1)**

- (1) They claim God does not exist, because
 - (a) they are corrupt,
 - (b) they do abominable things, and
 - (c) their lives are not devoted to good.
- (2) Even so, God through His grace wants to save them.

6. Romans 1 shows how all this comes out in their behavior,

24 Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, 25 who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen (Rom 1.24–25).

- a) God abandons man to live as he pleases;
 - (1) man dishonors God, but
 - (2) God lets man dishonor himself.
- b) When man deprives God of His glory,
 - (1) God deprives man of his glory,
 - (2) that man might see the problem with his unbelief.
- c) As man thinks unworthy conceptions of God’s nature,
 - (1) man acts unworthy of his humanity.
 - (2) What we think of God affects what we think of behavior.

7. Romans 1 then begins to specify behaviors,

26 For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. 27 Like-

wise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due (Rom 1.26–27).

- a) Homosexuality is not the only thing they do and
 - b) not all of them become homosexuals, but
 - (1) they accept it as an equal lifestyle with heterosexuality,
 - (2) manifesting their reprobate minds.
8. Romans 1 continues to show
- a) the consequences of removing the Creator
 - b) from the mind of the creature,

28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting (Rom 1.28).

- (1) If man does not want God in the mind,
 - (2) man will have a debased mind,
 - (a) manifested in behavior
 - (b) unfitting for the creation of a holy Creator.
9. Romans 1 lists those unfitting behaviors that come from a debased mind,

29 being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, 30 backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31 un-discerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; 32 who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them (Rom 1.29–32).

- a) Atheism is a serious problem

b) that leads to serious problems.

Exhortation:

I. God's presence threatens:

- A. man's moral standards,
- B. man's quest for autonomy,
- C. man's desire for concealment.

II. Man views God as the threat of all threats,

- A. threatening all desires and ambitions.
- B. Therefore, man's will fights God's will.

III. Man would rather die in sin than live eternally in obedience,

- A. refusing to see liberty in obedience.
- B. He thinks liberty comes by rebelling against God, but ends up in slavery.

IV. Question yourself.

- A. Do I believe what I believe because of sound reasoning? Or,
- B. Do I believe what I believe because that is what I want to believe?