**AGNOSTICS & ATHEISTS**

***Romans 1:19-32***

Sunday School Lesson 7

*Answers to Questions & Misconceptions About Salvation*

09/01/2019

**Introduction:** In our nation, there has been a significant increase of atheists and agnostics over the last three decades. Currently, it is estimated that there are between eighteen and twenty-five million American adults who identify as either an atheist or agnostic. There are also many more who seem to be totally indifferent toward any form of religion. To clarify what this means, agnostics are those who claim neither to believe or not believe in God. Many of them hold to the belief that it is impossible to know whether or not God exists. An atheist is more extreme in his position, as he outright denies the existence of God. Needless to say, reaching these people with the Gospel is an especially challenging task. Many atheists and agnostics feel a certain sense of logical and mental superiority to Christians. They view our faith as foolishness, and they incorrectly assume that our belief is blind and completely illogical. The witnessing Christian should understand this before engaging in conversation. In most cases, the witnessing Christian should set the expectation that he is simply trying to plant a seed that may need to be watered and cultivated over time. It is not very often that an agnostic or atheist puts his faith in Christ after only one conversation with a believer. Further, the believer should be careful to avoid an outright argument. If the atheist or agnostic is belligerent or totally closed off, the believer should dust his feet off and move along. However, the witnessing Christian may find that there are some who are open to a conversation. Just as we saw last week, there are some specific questions that you can ask which may open the door to the message of the Gospel. Before we look at these questions, though, we must identify one very important truth about these people: **God does not believe they exist!** According to Romans 1, it is impossible to truly be an Agnostic or Atheist. In reality, these folks are fighting against an inner matter that they know is Truth.

1. WOULD YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF AN OPEN-MINDED PERSON WHO IS WILLING TO CONSIDER A MATTER BEFORE DRAWING CONCLUSIONS? (2 TIMOTHY 1:7; 2 PETER 3:2; JOHN 5:39; PROV. 18:13; ACTS 18:4, 19; 24:25)

**The atheists and agnostics often pride themselves for their open-mindedness, but they don’t always extend that to people of faith.** The first step in leading an atheist or agnostic to Christ is to tear down the wall that they have put between themselves and Christians. Many of them will not even listen to a Christian because they think that we are incapable of reasoning. Consequently, if we can initiate a mental challenge to them to reason over what the Bible says, they will be forced to either admit that they are not open-minded, or they will accept our invitation to share with them the truths found in the Word of God. Of course, we can show them that the Bible does not encourage the Christian to have a mindless faith. The Bible says that the Lord gives us a sound mind. In other places, we are encouraged to be mindful of the words that we read and to search the Scriptures. Paul often reasoned with others regarding the tenets of the Gospel. Part of the problem for the atheist or agnostic is that they do not meet many Christians who have actually read and studied the Word of God. This reflects poorly on us and has done much damage to the message of the Gospel. A survey group recently tested various people based on their religious views to see which one’s knew the Bible the best. Sadly, there were several denominations that scored lower in Bible knowledge than those who surveyed as atheists or agnostics! If we are going to win a skeptic to Christ, we must be open to sharing and defending our Biblical positions.

1. HOW MUCH EVIDENCE WOULD I HAVE TO SHOW YOU IN ORDER FOR YOU TO BELIEVE THAT GOD EXISTS? (JOHN 1:3; ROMANS 1:20; HEBREWS 3:4; GENESIS 1:1; PSALM 19:1; ACTS 4:33)

**The atheists and agnostics want Christians to prove that God exists, but they do not often define how Christians are able to prove it to them.** The hope with this question is that the atheist or agnostic will stop to consider exactly how much evidence they would need in order to believe that God exists. The answer to this question might vary. Some might say that they need to see Him physically before they could ever believe. Others might say that they just need indisputable evidence. Some may choose to run away from the question and state that there isn’t enough evidence to prove He exists. In that case, you can remind them of their assurance they gave that they would have an open mind. Whatever the answer, you can then proceed to point to some of those evidences. Intelligent design is major evidence of God’s existence. If the earth were positioned even fractionally closer or further from the Sun, it would not be able to sustain life on it. If the earth were slightly bigger or smaller, it would not be able to sustain life on it. The laws of nature also point to intelligent design. Every aspect of nature has a specific structure and purpose. Science uses terms such as “eco-system.” Who made this system? Has there ever been a system that has come into existence on this earth without an inventor? The agnostic might agree that there must be someone or something that created this world. However, they might argue that this person is God and that He is revealed through His Son Jesus Christ. To that, we can point to the eyewitnesses of His Resurrection. There were many eyewitnesses. We can also point out the uniqueness of Christ compared to the other religions of the world. Even if the atheist or agnostic refuses to believe these evidences, the witnessing Christian can rejoice that they were able to plant the seed.

1. DO YOU REQUIRE THE SAME AMOUNT OF EVIDENCE FOR OTHER THINGS THAT YOU BELIEVE ARE TRUE OR EXIST? (JOHN 3:7-12; 12:37-40; 20:24-31; LUKE 16:27-31; ROM. 1:20-21)

**The atheists and agnostics do not usually require the same burden of proof for science and other matters of life as they do for God.** Unfortunately, even after showing evidence to an atheist or agnostic, they will very likely continue to reject it. The follow-up question to this is whether they require the same type of evidence for other things that they believe. Most atheists, especially, put a tremendous amount of faith in science. This is somewhat crazy considering how often science has been wrong throughout the centuries. In fact, science itself is very slow to state something as a law. Most of what science states is listed as a theory. This means that it is the opinion of men based upon their observance of evidence. Yet, people will gladly believe these theories as if they are absolute facts. Most atheists and agnostics want God to physically appear to them in order to believe. You might ask them if they would do the same for the builder of a house. If they saw a house by the road, would they require to see the person who built it in order to believe that such a person exists? Of course, the answer is “no.” It is an assumption that there must be a builder of that house. It did not just appear. Why is that same assumption not given for the world collectively? The best way to challenge the atheist or agnostic in their beliefs is to show the double standard that they have when trusting God versus the things of this world. You can then show them from the Bible that this is nothing new. People have been biased against God for as long as there has been sin in the world. The rich man asked for Lazarus to witness to his brothers. Somehow, he thought that this additional evidence would convince them. Yet, Abraham tells him that if they did not believe the prophets, they would not believe Lazarus. The Pharaoh refused to believe even though he saw the hand of the Lord with his own eyes. Many people during the time of Christ physically saw Him but yet still willingly chose not to believe in spite of the overwhelming evidence available to them.

1. DO YOU THINK THAT IT IS POSSIBLE FOR ANYONE TO KNOW EVERYTHING? (2 TIMOTHY 3:7; 2 CORINTHIANS 4:6; ROMANS 2:20; ISAIAH 55:8; ROMANS 11:33; HEBREWS 11:1)

**The atheist and agnostic will readily agree that man’s knowledge is very limited, yet the atheist somehow definitively “knows” that there is no God.** The atheist preaches constantly that man knows very little about the universe. They will use this line of thinking constantly against Christians. Yet, the very thought must be equally applied in reverse. Since man knows so little, how could any atheist know that there is no God? The answer is that their faith in mankind and hope in this earth are what give them the confidence to proclaim that God does not exist. Through this question, you can show the atheist and the agnostic that they have their own belief system that is equally reliant upon faith and whatever limited knowledge they possess. The hope is that through their increased knowledge of Jesus Christ, they may be saved. Nobody in this world has total knowledge. We are always learning, and as we learn, we begin to believe and understand new things. Thirty years ago, would you have believed that we would be able to send messages to each other in mere seconds? For believers, we seek increased knowledge through the Word of God. As we learn It, our faith in God and understanding of God increase.

1. ARE YOU NOW WILLING TO TRULY SEEK OUT THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD WITH AN OPEN MIND? (ACTS 17:27; HEB. 11:6; JAMES 4:8; JEREMIAH 29:13; PSALM 14:2; LUKE 11:9-10)

**The atheist and agnostic do not sincerely want to find God. If they did, they would most certainly find Him.** While some atheists and agnostics know many Bible verses and stories, they somehow do not know God. They might tell you that they have tried looking for Him, but they have never found Him. The truth is that they have never sincerely looked for Him. They do not really want to find Him. As Jesus said, they love their darkness. They do not want to be changed. Everyone that sincerely wanted to find Christ during His earthly ministry found Him. Herod wanted to find Him for the wrong reasons, so it is not surprising that he never found Him! If you have made it to this point in the conversation, you must see if they are now willing to seek Him sincerely. If not, then you must move on and pray that they will respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit of God. You’ve done your job. You’ve answered the fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.