

“Building Bridges” (part 2)
July 23, 2017

Ephesians 2:11-18

CORE: We are called to connect with those who live “without hope and without God in the world” (i.e., Atheists)—in order to connect them with Jesus—“our only Hope” (1 Timothy 1:1).

NOTE: Some atheists are angry, arrogant, and narrow-minded (yet, there are Christians with the same attitudes). With that frame of mind, it becomes extremely difficult to have a meaningful conversation.

Yet, there are ways to build bridges with atheists:

1. HONOR

“Honor all” (1 Peter 2:17) is one of the wisest words of advice in the Bible.

NOTE: We must be willing to give credit to people who have made contributions to society or shown compassion to people, etc. rather than the “blanket rejection” of people because we disagree with their philosophies/views.

2. UNDERSTANDING

“Whoever is patient has great understanding, but one who is quick-tempered displays folly.” (Proverbs 14:29) “The anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” (James 1:20)

- True atheism can be traced to the Garden of Eden’s temptation to **“*be as (in the place of) God.*”**
- The term, “atheism,” was believed to originate in 6th century Europe. The Greek prefix “a” denotes “without, lacking, or opposed to” God. The term “secular” also means “without God.”
- Gained momentum in the 18th century—with a determination to end the rule of religion on humanity. To end the control of superstition on the human mind.
- NOTE: **We must acknowledge the detrimental effects of religious legalism and superstitions.** (i.e., “*godless myths and old wives’ fables.*” 1 Timothy 4:7)
 - “*Science and Christianity are incompatible*”
 - “*Honest assessment of a problem is a ‘negative confession’*”
 - “*If the groom sees the bride in her gown before the wedding (bad luck)*”

- **We must be willing to acknowledge error and receive correction, even** when it comes **from atheists**. (NOTE: Their greatest frustration with Christians is their apparent unwillingness to address issues honestly)
- **When confronted by the Holy Spirit** with further revelation—we must be **willing to discard** learned traditions & doctrines that contradict His Truth.
- NOTE: Many atheists are involved in a **continuous pursuit of truth**—relentlessly—wherever it takes us. (Many Christians are terrified to ask questions or consider scientific evidence or consider a new thought)
- NOTE: We can be so afraid that “science” will turn over a rock that conclusively disproves God—therefore, we are afraid to “turn over any rock” (Easier to “dis” science than to rest in the reality that “the Truth will prevail”)
- NOTE: **Many atheists bring a refreshing willingness to ask questions; while many Christians have stopped asking questions** a long time ago.
- Followers of Jesus should be the most ruthless pursuers of truth! The ones who **ask the most questions**. (NOTE: *We are transformed by the **renewing of our minds—not by removing them!***)

3. TRUST

- **Jesus will always lead us into Truth**—because He IS the Truth! So, to follow Jesus—is to follow Truth.
- We should never live in fear that Truth will lead us to lose our faith. Ultimately, **“the Truth will set us free”** from superstition and religion.

4. SEE WITH SPIRITUAL EYES (insight)

- **There is a stirring in the hearts of many atheists**. Some atheist thinkers and speakers are beginning to say *things like*:
 - *“We miss the healthy boundaries and sense of blessing that having a theology brings.”*
 - *“We’ve lost a sense of community.”*
 - Some are asking, *“Can we have religion in our atheist world?”*

[SEE “The Five Awakenings”- Attachment]

NOTE: **Listen to the heart of these questions**. These are people trying to identify and meet the deepest longings of their souls. They don’t want lifeless religion. They don’t want joyless existence. They don’t want lifeless religious forms that leave their souls empty!

If all they are offered is religious formulas void of life—they will continue to identify themselves as against God. But **maybe, at the heart, they oppose the same things we oppose**. When you **“taste and see the Lord is good”**—you want no imitations! When you’ve experienced real relationship with Him and His people—you won’t settle for shallowness in either realm.

What separates us is the fact that we have different answers. But what could connect us is the fact that **we ask the same questions**. Searching for meaning. Trying to make sense of life, seeking answers to the question: ***“Why are we here?”*** We are all searching for intimacy: ***“Can I be known and be loved?”*** We are not healthy when we disconnect. ***“It is not good for man to be alone.”*** We all have **the need to belong; to love and be loved.**

We all have a need for progress; to know that you can be better than you are; that the world can be different; that you can make a difference. We all need **HOPE.**

Ironically, the atheist world-view is built on **scientific cause & effect** (i.e., logically, everything must have a significant **beginning** in order to significantly **be**). Therefore, it is ironic that the ultimate beginning is relegated to an arbitrary cosmic “accident”). It makes more sense that the very first “effect” had a “first cause”—that **complexity comes out of intelligence rather than “accident”** (i.e., a city did not emerge from an arbitrary act).

Reason and faith are not opposed to one another. Yet, reason has its limits.

Matthew 16- Peter received revelation of Jesus’ true identity: ***“You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.”***

Jesus responded: ***“Blessed are you, Simon...for this was revealed to you by my Father!”*** (i.e., you got the answer, not from your own reason, but from revelation)

We cannot find God unless He reveals Himself to us. Some things we know through our senses. Yet, some things are only known by faith.

The greatest proof of the existence of God is a changed life! (Heals us of our wounds from the past, forgives us, sets us free from self-indulgence, cleanses lies, replaces them with truth)

ATTACHMENT:

THE FIVE AWAKENINGS

Awakening to Longing This is the feeling that “*there’s got to be more.*” We all feel the longing for love, purpose and meaning. **The quest to satisfy these basic longings sends all of us on a journey.** The common experience lies in not understanding that God gave these longings to us, so we try to satisfy those longings by running away from God rather than toward Him.

Awakening to Regret We pursue those primitive longings without God and when we do, we find ourselves alone, directionless and confused. Regret finds us saying, *I wish I could start over.* Many people get stuck repeating these first two awakenings. Jon and I call that repetition the “sorry cycle”—pursuing God-given longings outside of a relationship with God, which leads to regrettable decisions and actions. Many people get stuck in the “sorry cycle” for months, some for years. Others never escape it.

Awakening to Help After repeating the “sorry cycle” of trying to fulfill these longings without God and ending up with regret over and over again, we acknowledge that something has to change. **We come to the end of ourselves and say, *I can’t do this on my own.*** We hit rock bottom. We come to our senses. We need help. And that help is Jesus.

Awakening to Love Jesus is the one who leads us back to God. **As we come back to God, we’re ambushed by grace and discover *God, loves me deeply after all.*** However, a shadow of shame and guilt follows us home, and we struggle to believe we’re loved just as we are.

Awakening to Life Through following Jesus, we discover “life and have it to the full.” The New Testament uses two words for life: *bios* and *zoe*. *Bios* refers to chronological life as in days, months and years. But *zoe* has a deeper meaning, referring to life as it was meant to be lived. *Zoe* is eternal life. When Jesus offers to His followers, “life and have it to the full,” He uses the word *zoe*. As we experience this final awakening we realize, *Now, this is living!*