

The Christian Atheist

What is an Atheist? Atheism could simply be defined as the BELIEF that there is no God. It is not to be confused with Agnosticism, which is the UNCERTAINTY of God. In America, about 10% of people claim to be atheists (per the highest polls). In the Bible it says "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" (Psalm 14:1) and "the wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts" (Psalm 10:4). Most people reject atheism as foolish. However, most people are in fact practical atheists, or Christian Atheists.

A few years ago Parker Palmer described a certain prevalent mindset among people who claimed to believe but in behavior did not demonstrate this belief as "Functional Atheism".¹ He said that someone is a Functional Atheist when they believe that ultimate responsibility for everything rests with us. Let us consider for a moment the previous passage: "The fool says in his heart...." Perhaps we are meant to see that this is not the blatant atheist of our time, but something more subtle. Perhaps in fact the proverb speaks to the one who has an overt profession of faith, but a practical lifestyle of atheism. This then is the Christian Atheist.

Very simply put, someone is a Christian Atheist when they believe that everything depends on us to accomplish. It is the person who leaves no room for the work of God, such as in evangelism, or in faith. Consider that Paul to the church in Corinth "So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase....For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building." (1 Corinthians 3:7,9)

Someone is a Christian Atheist when they do not consider judgment. Many live their lives with a profession of faith, but an absence of consideration for a judgment day. Jesus said "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the Day of Judgment" (Matthew 12:36) Paul told the Roman church of Christ "(God) will render to each one according to his deeds" (Romans 2:6). Too many live with a moral recklessness that suggests the absence of real belief.

Along the same lines, someone is a Christian Atheist when they have no fear of God. "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries." (Hebrews 10:26-27). We are told to fear God constantly; perhaps those who do not, simply do not believe in God in their heart?

Finally, someone is a Christian Atheist when they believe God thinks like us. Case in point: in an April 2011 interview, a well known radio host said "Non-Christians who seek God with a sincere heart, which would be Gandhi....can be saved..." (Bill O'Reilly, April 25, 2011). His opinion is parallel to many others; "God thinks like me" is a confession that "there is no God". Along those lines, when we say "God won't send good people to hell", or "God is not concerned with how we worship", or "God likes instrumental music", what we really profess is that God is of the same mind I am on all things; deep down, there cannot be a God.

We must reject Christian Atheism. We must do so by placing God in charge, as Paul did in II Corinthians 12. We must learn the fear of God as spoken of in Philippians 2:12. Finally, we must find the Mind of God, as spoken of in II Timothy 2:15

¹ Parker Palmer at <http://blog.fuller.edu/churchthenandnow/2009/01/20/functional-atheism-and-the-metro-red-line/>