

Why I am a Christian:

in a scientific, humanistic and atheistic world

Part VII: The Values of the Bible

The values that God communicates through the Bible ARE my values. That is not to say, however, that I believe that every story or event of the Bible is morally normative or imperative. (Please see **Part VI: *The Bible is a Human Book***). Some of the heroes of the bible are immoral, but their stories are included in the bible to demonstrate the power of redemption or, to serve as a caution against spiritual arrogance. Other heroes of the bible demonstrate the incredible potential of humanity to create and love. We are meant to interact with the stories of the Bible, wrestle with them, object to those of dubious value, and embrace those that stand the test of time and debate.

A. God Created the **universe** (Genesis 1, 2)

1. There is something that **transcends** the boundaries of the universe

- Christians call this something God
- This was accepted by **faith** for thousands of years.
- The belief that the universe is orderly, and that this order can be understood, led Christians to create the **scientific method**
- Science has confirmed the Christian belief that something does transcend the boundaries of this universe (see **Part III: *God created science***)
- The fact that people of faith have believed for thousands of years what science has only recently been able to prove is a NICE FAT PLUS in the column for divine **revelation**, though no radical anti-theist could ever grant such an argument: they are too invested in their rage against the concept of God.

Just a thought: Isn't it interesting that science is a creation of a belief system, hence proving that the radical anti-theists are wrong when they claim that faith is antithetical to knowledge and discovery

Just a warning: If you would dare suggest to a radical anti-theist that science confirms a long-held Christian belief, expect their head to explode with rage and do 360 degree spin around their neck (*a la* the **Exorcist**), for blood to spurt out their eyes, then expect them to regurgitate a bullet list of the immoral revelations of the bible as fed to them by Christopher Hitchens, all of which are taken out of context but suit their purposes to feel better about themselves and to believe that they are still in control of the situation. See the extended addendum to **Part VI: *The Bible is a Human Book***)

2. This universe does not belong to **humanity**

- It is not ours to do with as we please
- We need to have more **humility** before we begin splitting atoms and splicing DNA (though, that is not to say we should not experiment)

3. Life, therefore, is a **gift**: it is not promised to us, and we are not owed anything

- A spirit of **gratitude** is the appropriate response to the blessings of life
- Christians **worship** God in order to acknowledge these blessings (see **Part IV: *Accountability***); and, to prevent us from taking this life for granted and developing a spirit of **entitlement**
- Worship isn't about an egomaniacal god feeding on our worship, but our need to say *thank you*.

4. The source of human **freedom** transcends government, therefore cannot be legislated or abridged

- B. God created male and female in God's **image** (Genesis 1:26-31, Genesis 2; Ephesians 5:21-6:2 which says just the opposite of what most read into it)
1. Male and female are **equal** partners in creation
 - We may have a different physical build
 - However, we both have been gifted with the image of God
 2. Every human life is equally **precious**
 - ALL humanity comes from the same **stock**: this is another empirical truth discovered by science that we people of faith have believed for thousands of years. A second plus for divine revelation.
 - The theme of the Bible is **delivery** from slavery and oppression (Genesis, Exodus, I & II Samuel, I & II Kings, all the prophets, Jesus, heck, the whole Bible)
 3. To be created in the image of God is to be gifted with **love, laughter, curiosity, and creativity**
 - We can never use the excuse, "I'm only human," to dismiss our warts and faults.
 - To be human is to be created with a staggering potential for **greatness**.
- C. God created one law: **love**
1. Love is the **highest** morality
 - According to the 6 stages of moral development as delineated by Lawrence Kohlberg, love would be a Universal Ethical Principle, the highest stage of ethical development

What are the 6 stages of moral development?

Level 1 (*Pre-Conventional*)

1. Obedience and punishment orientation (*How can I avoid punishment?*)
2. Self-interest orientation (*What's in it for me?*)

Level 2 (*Conventional*)

3. Interpersonal accord and conformity (*Social norms*) (*The good boy/good girl attitude*)
4. Authority and social-order maintaining orientation (*Law and order morality*)

Level 3 (*Post-Conventional*)

5. Social contract orientation
6. Universal ethical principles (*Principled conscience*)

- Love responds to the needs of others, not to what is in **my** best interest
 - Christians do not act morally out of **fear** of hell or in **demand** to constrictive legalisms
 - Every moral and good law is better practiced by loving
2. Love of self is a pre-requisite of loving others (**Illustration:** In case of an emergency in and airplane, we are to take care of ourselves first, then those with us. This is a logical response, since I would be no good at helping the ones I love if I am at risk.)
 - We are to care for ourselves (our body is the temple of God)
 - We are to care for our families
 - Love does not neglect **primary** concerns in order to fulfill the desires of others
"What good does it do if the you save the whole world, but your family goes to hell?" Ella Jones
 3. The love of God in Jesus Christ represents the BEST of humanity's **ideals**: we are not able to achieve this level of love, but we yearn and strive for it

In My Opinion: Radical anti-theists are wrong in their diagnosis of why Christians are motivated to behave morally. They claim that we only do so because we are afraid of going to hell. Fear is the lowest stage on the moral ladder, though it is the first steward of morality for humans, including anti-theists. It is true that Christians, like anti-theists, begin their moral journey with fear. However, that is not the end to a Christian's moral development.

Radical anti-theists have a vested interest in dismissing Christian morality as the product of fear. Dealing with a radical anti-theist is like dealing with a radical Muslim. A radical Muslim will tell you that Christians believe in 3 Gods: Father, Jesus and Mary. Christians would reply, *"No, we believe in one God, and Mary is not God."* The Muslim would reply, *"Yes, you do. I know this because Mohammed said that this is what you believe."* They have created a circular argument that cannot be broken, because their hero of faith cannot be wrong, nor his understanding culturally limited.

Dealing with a radical anti-theist is similarly frustrating. *"You only believe because you are afraid of going to hell."* To which we respond, *"No, we don't. It may have been our beginning point, but it is not our ending point."* To which they reply, *"Yes, you do, because Sam Harris says that you do, therefore you must. Even if you don't, you are the exception which just proves the rule."* Once again, the anti-theist's cultural icons say that this is how we believe, so, ironically, the anti-theist accepts it by faith. Many anti-theists will hearken back to their days as Christians and tell you that this was their experience with people of faith. None of that is proof, however. Arguing from anecdotes is by definition a fallacious argument. Anti-theists would never allow a Christian to argue from such a fallacy, but the radical anti-theists accept it as proof when they argue from their own anecdotes.

In truth, part of the chip on the radical anti-theist's shoulder is the result of similar treatment at the hands of radical Christians who cannot concede the concept of a moral atheist. There are many moral atheists, and there are many Christians who are only moral because they are afraid of hell. The reverse is also true. There are many immoral atheists, and many Christians who live to a significantly higher moral standard. Maybe we need to stop playing *"gotcha"* and listen and respect each other, instead. We are all on an journey: let's do it together.

D. Humans desire that the universe be about "**me**" (Genesis 3 and following)

1. This is the **ONLY** sin: putting myself 1st at another's expense.
 - This is a scale-able concept that applies to every human **brokenness**
 - Anti-theists claim that this concept is **immoral**, since it does not distinguish between the taking of the last Twinkie in the bread box and the murder of someone.
 - However, both break relationship
 - If we take the seemingly smaller scaled selfish acts more seriously, there would not BE murder or hurt on a larger scale
2. Humans invent many sadistic tools of **oppression** that are used to impose our wills upon others
 - **Slavery**
 - **Totalitarianism**
 - **Weapons** of mass destruction
 - Intrusive **technology**
 - Centralized **government**
3. We are all responsible for our own **behavior**
 - We can't **blame** others for our failures
 - We are NEVER entitled to use the *"God defense"* to excuse our behavior: God NEVER asks us to do what is **immoral**.
 - If you do it, you **own** it: *don't blame God, or your abusive father, or your overbearing spouse...*

4. In addition to suffering from our own immorality, we do suffer on account of the selfish actions of our **fore-bearers** (this is what Christians call **original sin**, a particularly repugnant doctrine to radical anti-theists. This is foundational for the psychology industry: I'm not sure if that's a good or bad thing)
 - Because Sarah **manipulated** Abraham to cast out Ishmael from the family home, the people of the Middle East continue to suffer
 - We carry with us the scars and wounds of parental **abuse** and **neglect**
 - Original sin can't be used as an **excuse** for behavior, nor does it condemn me to future **futility**.
- E. Restoring broken relationships costs the person who **forgives** (The life of Jesus: Matthew-John)
 1. My life requires the **death** of something for me to continue living
 - For me to live, I depend upon the death of vegetation and animal life
 - Sacrificial giving is a **prerequisite** of human survival (See the addendum to **Part VI: The Bible is a Human Book**)
 - The future of the **planet** depends upon my death for its continued survival (Everybody sing: *It's the circle of life...*)
 2. If I am to be restored in relationship to those whom I have harmed, there is always a **cost**
 - There is nothing I can do to restore a relationship that I have strained or broken (though there are many things I should do to indicate my desire in wanting this relationship restored)
 - The cost of restoring of a broken relationship is **forgiveness**
 - The cost of forgiveness can only be paid by the one who has been **harmed**
 3. Forgiveness leads to greater **responsibility** for the actions of my life
 - I have cost somebody something: for them to forgive me, they had to risk their **trust**, again
 - Out of love and respect for the forgiver, I will not place them in a position to be **wounded** by me again
 4. Freedom from slavery, oppression, brokenness and sin is THE **purpose** of the Bible story. (So sorry to those radical anti-theists who still think that the Bible never addresses issues of slavery and oppression of women. They need to stop reading what Christopher Hitchens says that the Bible says, and start reading the primary source material. A good place to begin would be reading Luke 4:16-22)
 5. Christians are to be a **light** to the world
 - We are to offer this freedom to everyone
 - We must not align ourselves with **power** in order to accomplish this task
 - Whenever we attempt to free others by the use of power, government, and force, we become a part of the problem of the world.
 - Our actions of love and our words of love are to be the Christians only **offense**
 6. Our **loyalty** to God transcends government and even our biological family.
 - There will be those who oppose the radical freedom we offer, because freedom and equality is an **indictment** of those who seek to enforce their will through politics or force.
 - This is the reason why Jesus was killed: love is a threat to the **power brokers**

7. Our faith is to be lived now, not for the **future** kingdom.
 - This does not mean that we do not believe in **heaven**.
 - The belief in heaven, however, does give us the ability to stretch our love beyond what we might normally be comfortable giving (See **Part IV: Accountability** as evidence that Christians do volunteer and give more than those that do not live a life of faith. This is empirical proof that faith does make a significant moral difference, which is a severe blow to the anti-theist's perspective).
8. This is why we do "**church**"
 - There are times when I need the support of a community
 - There are times the community needs my support

In Sum: Anti-theists want you to give one pithy answer as to why you believe in God. Why? Because they have all of the talking points down and can point out the "absurdity" of each of your simple answers. It gives them a perceived power over you. However, belief in God is not summarized by a simple pithy answer. Faith is complex and requires a lifetime journey of intellectual and spiritual struggle. Radical anti-theists do not really want you to flesh out your faith for them. They don't really care about you. They like living under the comforting illusion that they have created for themselves that faith, by definition, means non-thinking, which it does not. Therefore, they can simply dismiss you without ever having to deal seriously with those who believe: you are delusional and irrational in their viewpoint. Why do they know this? Because, "*Sam Harris tells us so and he is a demigod, he's smart, so he should know and he's given us all of the arguments we need to defeat you and to reveal your stupidity. We don't need to respect and listen to irrationality.*" As a consequence, the world sighs, hatred is justified, and the violence of disrespect and hate under the guise of intellectualism is perpetuated. Unfortunately, many Christians aren't any better. Radical Christians label anti-theists as evil and tools of Satan. In so doing, they use the same hate-filled rhetoric of the radical anti-theist: they think that they defeat the anti-theist by labeling them, therefore, never having to legitimately deal with their opinions and stories. When we label others or reduce them to a caricature, we dismiss them; the cost, however, is a continued violence to humanity. We Christians cannot demand or expect anything of the radical anti-theists, but we should expect better of Christians. Our values should not allow us to treat others with such disrespect. After all, everyone is a creation of God and a subject of God's desire and love. That is the most important Christian value of all.