



ATHEISM EXPLAINED

Understanding Atheism Through a Christian Lens

A Quick Reference Guide Comparing Atheistic Thought
with the Claims of Jesus Christ

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Introduction

Atheism is one of the fastest-growing worldviews in many parts of the world. Chances are that you know an atheist, work with an atheist, have an atheist family member, or have encountered atheist arguments online. Yet despite its growing influence, many people misunderstand what atheists actually believe.

This guide is not written to mock atheists, attack atheists, or assume that all atheists think alike. It is also not written as a debate book. Instead, it is designed to help Christians understand atheism, examine the questions atheists often raise, and compare atheistic beliefs with the claims of Christianity.

One of the most important things to understand is that atheism is not a religion. Atheists generally do not worship a god, follow a sacred scripture, or belong to a unified belief system. The one thing that unites atheists is a lack of belief in God or gods. Beyond that, atheists may hold a wide variety of views about science, morality, meaning, politics, and spirituality.

Many atheists are thoughtful, intelligent people who have sincerely wrestled with questions about God, suffering, science, religion, and truth. Some rejected belief in God after studying the evidence. Others were raised without religion. Still others have been hurt by religious institutions and no longer trust religious claims.

Throughout this guide, we will examine common atheist beliefs and compare them with the teachings of Christianity. Our goal is not to win arguments, but to seek truth, understand different perspectives, and honestly consider the evidence for both worldviews.

Whether you are a Christian seeking to understand atheism, an atheist curious about Christianity, or someone still searching for answers, we hope this guide provides a helpful starting point for your journey.

What Is Atheism?

At its simplest, atheism is the absence of belief in God or gods. The word comes from the Greek prefix “a-” meaning “without” and “theos” meaning “god.” An atheist is therefore someone who does not believe that a god exists.

However, not all atheists think alike. Some atheists actively believe that no gods exist. Others simply remain unconvinced by the evidence presented for God’s existence. Because of this, atheism is often divided into different categories.

Strong atheism is the belief that no gods exist. Weak atheism is a lack of belief in God without necessarily claiming certainty that God does not exist. Many modern atheists fall into this second category.

Atheism is also often confused with agnosticism. Agnosticism deals with knowledge, while atheism deals with belief. An agnostic may say, “I do not know whether God exists.” An atheist may say, “I do not believe God exists.” Some people identify as both agnostic and atheist, meaning they do not claim certainty but currently do not believe in God.

It is also important to understand what atheism is not. Atheism is not a religion. It has no central authority, no universal creed, no sacred scripture, and no single set of moral teachings accepted by all atheists. As a result, atheists may disagree strongly with one another on politics, morality, science, and many other subjects.

The one thing that unites atheists is the rejection of belief in God or gods. Beyond that, atheists hold a wide variety of views about life, meaning, morality, and the universe.

Atheism vs. Agnosticism

These terms are often confused, but they are not the same thing.

Atheism deals with belief. An atheist does not believe God exists.

Agnosticism deals with knowledge. An agnostic says they do not know whether God exists.

Because belief and knowledge are different questions, some people identify as both agnostic and atheist. They do not claim certainty that God does not exist, but they currently do not believe that He does.

Likewise, some people identify as agnostic theists, meaning they believe in God but admit they cannot prove His existence with absolute certainty.

Understanding this distinction is important because many modern atheists are actually agnostic atheists rather than people who claim to know with certainty that no God exists.

Position	Simple Meaning
Strong Atheist	"I believe no God exists."
Agnostic Atheist	"I do not know for certain, but I do not believe God exists."
Agnostic Theist	"I believe God exists, but I cannot prove it with absolute certainty."
Strong Theist	"I believe God exists and am convinced by the evidence."

Most people do not fit perfectly into one category, but this chart helps explain why atheism and agnosticism are not necessarily opposites.

How Did Atheism Develop?

While many people think of atheism as a modern idea, disbelief in gods has existed throughout history. Ancient civilizations were often deeply religious, but there were individuals and philosophical schools that questioned traditional beliefs about the gods.

In ancient Greece, philosophers such as Democritus and Epicurus sought natural explanations for the world rather than attributing everything to divine activity. Although they were not atheists in the modern sense, their ideas influenced later thinkers who argued that the universe could be understood without appealing to supernatural causes.

The modern growth of atheism is often connected to the Enlightenment, a period during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when reason, science, and skepticism became increasingly influential. Many thinkers began challenging traditional religious authority and argued that beliefs should be tested through evidence and rational inquiry.

During the nineteenth century, several influential figures helped shape modern atheistic thought. Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection offered a natural explanation for the diversity of life. Karl Marx viewed religion as a human invention that reflected social and economic conditions. Friedrich Nietzsche famously declared that "God is dead," arguing that belief in God was losing its influence in Western culture.

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries saw the rise of secularism and what became known as the "New Atheism." Writers such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett argued that belief in God is unnecessary and that science provides a better explanation for reality than religion.

Today, atheism is not a single movement with a single set of beliefs. Some atheists are passionate critics of religion. Others simply live their lives without belief in God and rarely think about religion at all. What unites atheists is not a shared worldview on every issue, but a shared lack of belief in God.

Christians agree that reason and evidence are important, but they believe that science and faith are not enemies. Many Christians view scientific discoveries as helping us understand the universe God created rather than replacing the need for God altogether.

The Universe and Origins

One of the biggest questions humanity has ever asked is: "How did we get here?"

Atheists and Christians often agree on many scientific observations, but they frequently disagree about what those observations ultimately mean.

Many atheists believe the universe can be explained through natural processes without the need for a Creator. They point to scientific theories such as the Big Bang and biological evolution as explanations for the origin of the universe and the diversity of life on Earth.

The Big Bang Theory proposes that the universe began expanding from an extremely hot and dense state approximately 13.8 billion years ago. Contrary to popular belief, the Big Bang Theory does not explain what caused the universe to begin or why it exists. Instead, it describes how the universe developed from its earliest known state.

Many atheists argue that because science can explain natural processes, there is no need to invoke God as an explanation. From this perspective, the universe is the result of natural laws and physical processes rather than divine creation.

Christians generally accept many scientific discoveries, including the existence of an expanding universe. However, Christians often ask a different question: What caused the universe to exist in the first place?

Many Christian thinkers point out that science describes how the universe operates, but does not necessarily explain why there is something rather than nothing. They argue that the existence of the universe, the laws of nature, and the apparent fine-tuning of the cosmos point toward an intelligent Creator.

The debate becomes even more significant when discussing life itself. Evolution by natural selection is accepted by many scientists as an explanation for how living organisms change over time. Some atheists view evolution as evidence that life developed without the need for God.

Christians hold a variety of views regarding creation and evolution. Some believe God created life through evolutionary processes, while others believe God created life in a more direct manner. Despite these differences, Christians agree that God is ultimately the Creator of the universe and everything within it.

At its core, the disagreement is not simply about science. It is often about whether the universe is ultimately the product of unguided natural processes or the purposeful work of a Creator.

Both atheists and Christians look at the same universe. The difference is often found not in what they observe, but in how they interpret what they observe.

Morality Without God

One of the most common questions Christians ask atheists is: "If there is no God, where do right and wrong come from?"

Many atheists reject the idea that belief in God is necessary for morality. They point out that atheists can be loving parents, honest employees, generous neighbors, and compassionate members of society. In everyday life, most atheists and Christians agree on many basic moral principles, such as the importance of honesty, kindness, justice, and protecting the vulnerable.

Many atheists explain morality as a product of human reason, empathy, social cooperation, and evolutionary development. They argue that human beings naturally developed moral behaviors because cooperation helped societies survive and flourish. According to this view, moral standards emerge from what promotes human well-being and reduces suffering.

Some atheists also appeal to concepts such as human rights, fairness, and social contracts. They argue that people can recognize certain actions as harmful or beneficial without appealing to a divine lawgiver. From this perspective, morality is something humanity discovers and develops together.

Christians agree that atheists can behave morally and often do many good things. The Bible teaches that all people are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), which gives every human being dignity, value, and a moral awareness. Christians therefore expect both believers and non-believers to recognize many basic moral truths.

However, Christians often ask a deeper question: If morality is ultimately based on human opinion, culture, or social agreement, can it ever be truly objective?

For example, if one society believes an action is right while another believes it is wrong, who decides which one is correct? If morality is merely a human invention, some Christians argue that there is no ultimate standard by which to judge competing moral claims.

Christianity teaches that morality is grounded in the character of God. According to the Bible, right and wrong are not merely personal preferences or cultural traditions. Instead, they reflect God's nature and His design for humanity. Because God is unchanging, Christians believe moral truth is ultimately objective rather than relative.

The debate is not usually about whether people should be moral. Both atheists and Christians generally agree that kindness, justice, honesty, and compassion are good. The disagreement is often about where those moral values come from and whether they exist independently of human opinion.

At its heart, the question is not simply, "Can atheists be moral?" Most Christians would answer yes. The deeper question is, "What provides the ultimate foundation for morality?"

Meaning and Purpose

If there is no God, does life still have meaning?

This is one of the most important questions in the conversation between atheism and Christianity. While atheists and Christians often agree on many practical aspects of life, they frequently answer this question in very different ways.

Many atheists believe that meaning is not something we discover but something we create. Rather than seeing purpose as something given by a Creator, they view it as something each person develops through relationships, achievements, experiences, personal goals, and the impact they have on others.

From this perspective, life can be deeply meaningful even without belief in God. An atheist may find purpose in raising a family, helping others, advancing scientific knowledge, creating art, building a career, or improving the world for future generations. Many atheists argue that life's temporary nature can actually make it more precious, encouraging people to value the time they have.

Some atheists also believe that meaning is subjective. In other words, different people may find purpose in different things. What matters is not whether a purpose comes from God, but whether it is meaningful to the individual.

Christians agree that relationships, service, creativity, and personal growth are valuable. However, Christianity teaches that humanity's deepest purpose is found in a relationship with God. According to the Bible, people were created by God and for God.

The Christian worldview teaches that meaning is not something we merely invent for ourselves. Instead, it is something we discover as we come to know the One who created us. Just as a manufacturer determines the purpose of a product, Christians believe God determines the ultimate purpose of human life.

Jesus summarized humanity's purpose in two great commands: to love God and to love others (Matthew 22:37–39). Christianity teaches that true fulfillment is found not simply in pursuing personal goals, but in knowing God and living according to His design.

One of the most significant differences between atheism and Christianity is whether meaning is ultimately subjective or objective. If there is no God, many Christians argue that meaning must ultimately be self-created. If God exists, then meaning can be grounded in something greater than ourselves.

The Bible describes eternal life not merely as living forever, but as knowing God. Jesus said, "And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3).

Both atheists and Christians seek purpose, significance, and fulfillment. The difference is often found in where they believe that purpose ultimately comes from.

Jesus and Christianity

Atheists hold a wide variety of views about Jesus. Some view Him as a wise moral teacher whose teachings influenced history. Others see Him as a religious leader whose followers later exaggerated His claims. Still others are skeptical that we can know much about Him with certainty.

Most historians—whether Christian, atheist, or something else—agree that Jesus of Nazareth was a real historical person who lived in first-century Israel. The debate is usually not about whether Jesus existed, but about who He was.

Many atheists accept that Jesus was a teacher, preacher, and influential figure in history. However, they generally reject the supernatural claims of Christianity, including miracles, the virgin birth, and the resurrection. Because atheism rejects the existence of God, many atheists conclude that miraculous events are unlikely or impossible.

Some atheists argue that Christianity developed over time and that the stories about Jesus were altered, embellished, or misunderstood by later generations. Others believe that the resurrection accounts can be explained through natural causes, such as legend, mistaken observations, or sincere but mistaken beliefs among Jesus' followers.

Christians agree that Jesus was a real historical person, but they believe He was much more than a teacher. Christianity teaches that Jesus is God in the flesh, who entered human history, lived a sinless life, died on the cross for the sins of the world, and rose from the dead three days later.

The resurrection is the central claim of Christianity. The Apostle Paul wrote that if Christ has not been raised, then the Christian faith is futile (1 Corinthians 15:14). Christianity does not stand or fall on moral teachings alone. It stands or falls on whether Jesus truly rose from the dead.

Christians point to several lines of evidence in support of the resurrection, including the empty tomb, the willingness of the apostles to suffer for their testimony, the rapid growth of the early church, and the numerous eyewitness claims recorded in the New Testament.

At its heart, the disagreement between atheism and Christianity is not simply about religion. It is about the identity of Jesus Christ.

Was Jesus merely a teacher? Was He a prophet? Was He mistaken? Or was He truly who He claimed to be—the Son of God and Savior of the world?

That question remains at the center of the conversation between atheists and Christians today.

Similarities and Differences

Atheism and Christianity offer very different answers to some of life's biggest questions. While many atheists and Christians may share similar moral values and concerns about human flourishing, they often disagree on the foundations of reality, morality, purpose, and truth.

Topic	Atheism	Christianity
God	Does not believe in God or gods.	Believes in one God who created and sustains all things.
Origins	The universe developed through natural processes without a Creator.	The universe was created by God with purpose and design.
Human Nature	Humans are products of natural processes and evolution.	Humans are created in the image of God and possess inherent dignity and value.
Morality	Often grounded in reason, empathy, social cooperation, and human flourishing.	Grounded in the character and nature of God.
Meaning and Purpose	Meaning is typically created by individuals and communities.	Meaning is discovered through a relationship with God and His purposes.

Topic	Atheism	Christianity
Jesus	Usually viewed as a teacher, historical figure, or religious leader.	Viewed as God in the flesh, Savior, and Lord.
Miracles	Generally rejected or viewed skeptically.	Accepted as acts of God within history.
Afterlife	Views vary, but many atheists believe death is the end of conscious existence.	Believes in resurrection, judgment, and eternal life.
Truth	Often understood through reason, evidence, and scientific inquiry.	Truth includes reason and evidence but is ultimately grounded in God.
Authority	No single authority accepted by all atheists.	The Bible is regarded as God's revealed Word.
Salvation	Generally not a category within atheism.	Salvation is found through Jesus Christ.
Ultimate Hope	Improving life in the present world.	Eternal life with God through Christ.

Despite these differences, many atheists and Christians share common concerns about justice, compassion, honesty, and the well-being of others. Productive conversations are often possible because both groups are asking many of the same questions, even when they arrive at different answers.

The most significant difference between atheism and Christianity is not merely a disagreement about religion. It is a disagreement about whether God exists and whether Jesus Christ is who He claimed to be. Everything else ultimately flows from the answer to those questions.

Christ

Every worldview attempts to answer life's biggest questions.

Why are we here? What is the meaning of life? Where did we come from? What happens after death? How should we live?

Atheism and Christianity offer very different answers to these questions. Ultimately, the difference between them comes down to one central issue: the person of Jesus Christ.

If Jesus was merely a teacher, then Christianity may be one philosophy among many. If Jesus was mistaken, then His claims can be rejected. But if Jesus truly rose from the dead, then His words deserve the attention of every person who has ever lived.

Christianity teaches that God created humanity for a relationship with Himself. Yet every person has sinned and fallen short of God's perfect standard (Romans 3:23). Rather than leaving humanity separated from Him, God demonstrated His love by sending His Son into the world.

Jesus lived the life we could not live and died the death we deserved. On the cross, He took upon Himself the penalty for sin. Three days later, He rose from the dead, defeating sin and death and offering forgiveness and eternal life to all who trust in Him.

Unlike many religions and philosophies that focus on what people must do to reach God, Christianity teaches that God came to us. Salvation is not earned through good works, religious rituals, knowledge, or personal effort. It is received as a gift through faith in Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:8–9 says:

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

The invitation of Christianity is not merely to believe certain facts about Jesus. It is to know Him.

Jesus said:

“And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” (John 17:3)

Whether you are a Christian, an atheist, or someone still searching for answers, we encourage you to examine the claims of Jesus for yourself. Read the Gospels. Consider the evidence. Ask honest questions.

The most important question is not whether Christianity is popular, ancient, or influential.

The most important question is: Who is Jesus?

Your answer to that question will shape how you answer every other question in life.

Sources

This guide was created using a combination of atheist, historical, scientific, and Christian sources in order to present atheism fairly while also explaining the Christian perspective.

Atheist and Secular Sources

Writings of Richard Dawkins; writings of Christopher Hitchens; writings of Sam Harris; writings of Daniel Dennett; secular philosophy and ethics resources; scientific literature regarding cosmology, evolution, and naturalism.

Christian Sources

The Holy Bible; Christian apologetics resources; historical studies on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Key Bible Passages Referenced

Genesis 1:1; Psalm 19:1; Matthew 22:37–39; John 1:1–14; John 10:30; John 14:6; John 17:3; Acts 17:22–31; Romans 1:18–20; Romans 3:23; Romans 5:8; Ephesians 2:8–9; Colossians 1:16–17; Hebrews 9:27; 1 Corinthians 15:14–20.

We encourage readers to examine the evidence for themselves, ask honest questions, and continue seeking truth with humility and an open mind.

Truth should never fear investigation.