

Christianity That Is Appealing to Atheists

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Reading Time: 4 minutes

I was a happy atheist. I didn't sense a need for any kind of religion in my life. However, I wasn't completely closed-minded toward religion. I visited a Baptist service, a Catholic Mass, and dabbled in the teachings of Buddhism (my favorite at the time). Yet, religion in all of its forms still seemed like nothing more than a collection of antiquated fairy tales—and I felt this way particularly about Christianity. It seemed so divided, contradictory, intellectually dishonest, and hypocritical. If you had asked me what I thought about Christianity, I would have said that Christians lived with an illogical, fear-inspiring blind faith in some kind of magic old guy in the clouds with a beard. (Today I shudder to think how blasphemous these words truly are.)

Slowly, as I exposed myself to Christianity, I became impressed. Christianity started to make sense. I couldn't stand it because I wanted my assumptions and biases to be true, but a shift was occurring.

As I reflect back on my time as an atheist visiting with and studying the church, there were certain characteristics of Christianity that were appealing, especially for me—someone with no faith at all.

Genuine Christianity

Hypocrisy has dealt a large blow to Christianity. One hypocrite can scar an unbeliever for life. While those in the church should have faith rooted in God and therefore be undismayed (though disappointed) by hypocrisy, we can't expect those who are skeptical of Christianity to do likewise. Hypocrisy doesn't necessarily prove that Christianity is false, but it certainly will not attract non-Christians. The New Testament is clear that our conduct as Christians can either help or be a detriment to those outside of the body (cf. John 13:35; 17:21; 1 John 2:5, 10; 3:10-14; 4:20-21).

When Christians let their light shine and “keep their conduct among the Gentiles honorable” (1 Pet. 2:12a), even atheists may eventually “glorify God on the day of visitation” (1 Pet. 2:12b). We cannot expect to get anywhere with atheists if we ourselves do not live as Christ in our daily lives. When I, as an atheist, was surrounded by *genuine* Christians, I was much more eager to hear them out.

Intellectually Honest Christianity

Atheists (for the most part) have thought their way into atheism (or at least have seemingly logical reasons for having no faith). If you ask an atheist why they have no faith, they will more than likely give you several reasons grounded in thought. So, when an atheist gets into a discussion with a Christian and that Christian cannot offer any ounce of reasoning, rationale, or logic for why they believe what they believe, that atheist will feel as if Christianity has nothing to offer him.

More than likely, those who have rejected Christianity do so for what they see as intellectual reasons (though emotion always plays a part). So, Christians should be able to reason about their faith efficiently and courageously (1 Pet. 3:15). Christianity that is appealing to atheists must be intellectually honest, and logically sound. Thankfully, biblical Christianity is just that. Once I was exposed to Christianity defended by sound logic and rationale, I was immediately interested as an atheist even when I wasn't yet convinced.

Christ-Magnifying Christianity

As an atheist, I lacked any kind of spiritual fulfillment. Of course, I was spiritually ignorant and assumed true spirituality was some kind of superstitious, tingly feeling. As it turns out, spiritual fulfillment is more than a feeling. It is something you can know (1 John 5:13) and is only found in Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Christianity that magnifies Christ is vital if we are to appeal to atheists because Jesus Christ is the most significant figure in history—the source

of reality and truth, the head of the church, and the foundation of the faith. His existence is rationally undeniable, His words are challenging, His love is incomprehensible, and His example is unprecedented.

Often times we are scared to discuss the challenging teachings of Jesus with skeptics (i.e. Matt. 18:8-9; Mark 10:1-12; Luke 13:3; 14:26). But the blunt truth is that we cannot win people to Jesus if we're ashamed of *any* His teachings. The fact of the matter is, nobody else has ever taught with the authority of Jesus. His words prove His divinity. Likewise, the prophecies He fulfilled and the love He displayed are some of the strongest proofs. Ultimately, it was Jesus who drew me to Christianity.

Undenominational Christianity

As an atheist, one of the most unappealing aspects of Christianity was the division I saw in Christendom. The fact that I could find 20 different churches on one street that all disagreed with each other on major doctrines seemed to contradict their claim to be from God. Therefore, I thought, Christianity must be a sham. There was simply too much division for it to be from God. I still remember explaining this sentiment to a Christian I was studying the Bible with and them responding, "You're right! I agree." I was shocked. Then, as I began studying the New Testament myself I realized that the denominational division we see today is completely absent from the Christianity described in the Bible.

I began connecting Scriptures like Matthew 16:18, where Jesus says that He will build His church (singular), with Scriptures that describe the church as Christ's body (Eph. 1:22-23) and that—if Christ is the head—there can only be one body (Eph. 4:4; Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12-13, 20). I remember thinking that the division in Christendom today was even more extreme than the division so heartily condemned by Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:10.

I understand why Jesus prayed that His followers "may all be one" so that "the world may believe" that God sent Him (John 17:21). When the division that exists in Christendom today is present, it becomes a hurdle for unbelievers.

Undenominational Christianity appeals to atheists because the contradiction and division of denominationalism is blatantly illogical and, to my initial surprise, unbiblical. When I realized that I could simply follow Jesus and not participate in man-made and God-condemned division, I was even more interested. For some skeptics this might not be a big deal, but it was for me.

Conclusion

Sometimes, it is easy for the faithful to read verses like Hebrews 11:6 and conclude that atheists are too far gone to try to reach with the gospel. But, when Christians are genuine, intellectually honest, Christ-magnifying, and undenominational, a lot of good can happen. Hopefully, Christ's body can continue to reach out to those with no faith at all. I know firsthand that such people are not a lost cause.