

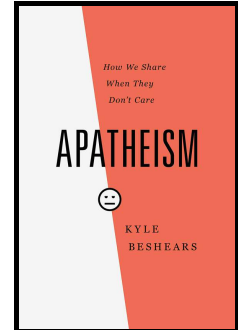
Apatheism: How We Share When They Don't Care

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(An overview and summary by Jeffrey Breshears)

Thesis.

- A *theist* believes in a supernatural, eternal and omnipotent Creator God.
- An *atheist* believes that the only reality is naturalistic matter.
- An *agnostic* believes that we cannot know whether or not there is a God.
- An *apatheist* doesn't really care if there is a God.
- The unhealthy pace of modern life.



Our Unique Time.

- The focus of historic Christian apologetics.
- Our contemporary challenge: blasé indifference.
 - ▶ Charles Taylor: Our society is characterized by secularism, comfort, prosperity, and non-stop distractions. [*A Secular Age* (2007), pp. 1-3, 19.]
 - ▶ Alan Noble: “The constant distraction of our culture shields us from the kind of deep, honest reflection needed to ask why we exist and what is true.... Secularism and technology have distracted us from God.” [*Disruptive Witness: Speaking Truth in a Distracted Age* (2018), p. 3.]

Origins of Apatheism.

- Pre-modern times:
 - ▶ Life in medieval Europe. [29-30]
- The Reformation-era wars (c. 1525-1648).
 - ▶ The final assessment: shift the emphasis from Christian orthodoxy to orthopraxy.
- Enlightenment rationalism (c. 1650-1800).
 - ▶ Implications of the *Imago Dei*.
 - ▶ Do we need special divine revelation (i.e., the Bible) so as to live a quality life?
 - ▶ Our central focus is no longer on God, but on ourselves and others.
- ▶ The re-emergence of secular humanism (c. 1800-1900).
 - ▶ Supernaturalism as superstitionism.
 - ▶ The cult of scientism.
 - ▶ Karl Marx: Religion as “the opiate of the people.”

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How to Share With Those Who Don't Care.

- To witness effectively to non-believers, we must appeal to both their mind and heart.
- Apatheists are usually not interested in philosophical and evidentialist arguments.
 - KB: “The only way to overcome apathy is to compel someone to self-reflection that is sustained long enough to allow for critical thinking.” [88]
- (1) Start by causing the non-believer to doubt his/her reasons for ignoring God.
- (2) Focus on their sources of joy, and why these do not provide ultimate fulfillment in life.
- (3) Ask: *“What brings you the greatest amount of joy and happiness in life?”*
 - *“What do you want the most in life?”*
 - *“Why is this your number one priority in life?”*
- (4) *“Consider how impermanent, fragile, or unreliable this is.”*
 - *“What if this relationship ended – or what if your future plans failed or your greatest source(s) of joy no longer satisfied you?”*
- (5) *“What has brought you the greatest disappointment and sorrow in life?”*
- (6) *“Unlike temporary things, temporary conditions, and temporary relationships, God is a permanent source of joy in life.”*
 - The ultimate source of joy is a relationship with our Creator and Sustainer of life.
 - We no longer live a self-centered life but become “a new creation” in Christ (II Cor. 5:17).
 - Be prepared to effectively explain and defend what you believe “with gentleness and respect” – per I Peter 3:15.
- Our personal testimony can have great impact as we share how our faith in Christ has given us both *joy* and *hope*.

The Summa.

- Apatheism is a challenge, but it is not an insurmountable problem.
 - KB: “Rarely, if ever, in the history of our faith have Christians faced the kind of indifference toward God that we experience today. So we ought to explore and employ ways to seed the gospel in this wilderness of apathy....
 “[But] we must first examine ourselves to ensure that we are joyful witnesses. We must ask ourselves: Have I been affected by our apathetic age? Does my life model the happiness and joy I claim to experience?...
 “Only after the Spirit has worked on our own hearts can we be used to invite other hearts in the kingdom....” [115]
- Col. 4:6 – “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person.”

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