

The Making of An Atheist II

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[0 : 00] The message this morning is the Making of an Atheist, Part 2. And this morning we do have two scriptures we'll be taking a look at.

Please at this time turn to Romans, Chapter 11. And in Romans, Chapter 11, we'll be looking at verses 33 through 36.

Oh, the depth of riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and unfathomable His ways!

For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again?

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

[1 : 38] Then, please go back in the New Testament a ways to the book of Ephesians.

Ephesians 1, verses 1-12.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.

To the saints who are at Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus. Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

[2 : 51] Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.

In love He predestined us to adoption, as sons through Jesus Christ, to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.

To the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished on us.

In all wisdom and insight, He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention, which He proposed in Him, with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times.

That is, the summing up of all things in Christ. things in the heavens and things on the earth.

[4 : 18] In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose, who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end, to the end, that we who were the first to hope in Christ, would be to the praise of His glory.

Tremendously significant concept, when you consider the apostle inspired of God, saying that God works all things according to the counsel of His own will.

That is a very sobering statement. How can it be that God works all things in accordance with the counsel of His own will, when we see so much going on in our world today, that clearly, in no way, shape, or form, can be considered compatible with the counsel of God's own will?

At least, there is no way we can see how it does. We are considering a theme called the making of an atheist, and the reason we are bringing this particular series is because atheism has been making some rather significant inroads into our culture that it had not enjoyed previously.

There have been a number of atheists who have written best-selling books, and they have appeared on talk shows, etc., and they have exercised a certain amount of influence over a number of people.

[6 : 06] And for the most part, these atheists are not dummies. They are intelligent people. Many of them are very gifted, articulate. Many of them are even research scientists, and they enjoy professorial chairs in some of the leading institutions throughout the country.

So they are people whose opinions and ideas are to be reckoned with rather than just summarily dismissed because they disagree with us. We are of the opinion that what the psalmist has said is true, that it is the one who says in his heart that there is no God is a fool.

But that, of course, is a fool in accordance with divine terminology. You cannot call these people fools insofar as human technology, understanding, and brilliance is concerned.

Many of them have IQs that far surpass ours. So speaking after the manner of humans, they are not fools at all. But from God's perspective, they are fools. And we'll have to decide whether we want to use God's perspective as our authority or human perspective.

In your bulletin this morning, we included a color photo shot of a billboard that was taken in New Zealand. And if you will take a look at that, you will notice that it says in very bold print, in the beginning, man created God.

[7 : 39] That's quite opposite of what we believe as believers, isn't it? Genesis 1.1 makes it very clear that in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

God created the heavens and the earth. But the take that the atheist has on that is that God is merely a figment of man's imagination.

It doesn't actually exist at all. And their billboard is put out there with the intent of influencing people. But I must admit, I was somewhat amused when I read it. And the bottom script that says, there's probably no God.

Probably? That doesn't sound nearly as dogmatic, I would think, as the atheist would like to be. Is there an element of uncertainty there?

[8 : 38] There's probably no God. And what if it turns out that there is a God? And the probably provides their worst nightmare.

Reminds me of Pascal's Wager. I don't know if you're familiar with that, but it's something that is interesting and probably ought to be put into the mix. Blaise Pascal was a believer.

He was a French philosopher, mathematician, and a physicist. And he lived between 1623 and 1662.

And his famous wager goes something like this. It asserts that humans all bet with their lives that God does or does not exist.

And the wager or Pascal's bet goes something like this. All right? Suppose there is a God and I live my life in accordance with that belief.

[9 : 48] And I take the scriptures at face value and I believe what the Bible says about God and about man and about Jesus Christ and about salvation. I enter into that and I believe on the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior.

And it all turns out to be wrong. There is no God. There is no judgment. There is no accounting. And I have lived my life as a believer believing something that isn't true.

But what have I actually forfeited? What did it cost me to live a life like that? On the other hand, if the wager takes the opposite turn, you believe that there is no God and it turns out that you are wrong and there really is a God who will hold us accountable and that there is a judgment day and there is punishment and reward for eternity.

What have you forfeited? Interesting to consider that. That's called Pascal's wager. And his thesis is that everyone risks their eternal being on whether or not there is a God.

In 1981, a well-respected, I'm sure very intelligent, Jewish rabbi by the name of Harold Kushner, wrote a book, turned out to be a best-selling book, called When Bad Things Happen to Good People.

[11 : 30] His conclusion, yes, bad things do happen to good people. That's undeniable. And God doesn't like it any more than we do, but he is powerless to do anything about it.

Really. Well, you know, don't be too quick to condemn the rabbi's thinking, because there is a sense in which God is powerless to do anything about it.

Now, that in itself sounds like an unacceptable concept, because God cannot be powerless in any way, shape, or form, can he? Yes, he can.

God can be powerless in any sense in which he has imposed a limitation upon his own power. Now, ordinarily, we think of God as being without limitations, and generally speaking, that is true.

But, if God deigns in his own wisdom to impose some kind of limitation upon himself, that's his prerogative to do so.

[12 : 34] in what way has God imposed a limitation upon himself? Well, that's the essence of our message this morning, in what we have labeled part two for the making of an atheist.

The reality of good and evil coexisting must surely be a major reason for the making of an atheist. And can we fault them?

I think not. you go back as far as Genesis and Exodus in the Old Testament, which in fact ties in with the concepts that were presented in the session this morning in the video series that we've been following with the children of Israel in Egypt.

Very fascinating presentation, by the way. How can you possibly account for the goodness of God and the power of God permitting a travesty, a vicious, brutal kind of thing, such as permitting the Egyptians to toss newborn baby boys born of a Jewish woman into the Nile River to be food for hungry crocodiles?

Where was God when that was happening? and according to the scriptures, the only reason that Moses was spared is because his mother Jochebed, out of desperation, put him in a little ark made of bulrushes and set him out there with the hope that God would somehow intervene and save his life.

[14 : 21] And of course you know the rest of the story with Pharaoh's daughter and so on, and how Moses rose to prominence and ultimately led the children of Israel out of Egypt.

But you know, we cannot wonder, help but wonder how many babies did not enjoy the rescue that Moses did.

How many of them actually perished? Where was God with the slaying of the innocents? When Herod was determined to kill the Christ child and ordered the execution throughout Bethlehem of all of the children that were two years of age and under.

To make sure that he got the right one, he ordered that they all in that time frame, in that age frame, be executed. You cannot help but wonder, where is this all-powerful, all-wise God when something like that was taking place?

And actually even involved supposedly his own son. How could this God of heaven, who is supposed to be benevolent and all-wise and all-powerful, allow this kind of atrocity to go on with all of these innocent children?

[15 : 33] And can you imagine the weeping and wailing that went on in Bethlehem? Rachel weeping for her children because they were not? Great lamentation that went up over the land? All of these mothers sobbing and sorrowing over the execution of their little born son.

Is there anything that can be more innocent and helpless and a baby boy two years of age or under? Where was God when these things were taking place?

Where is God when girls as young as three and four years of age are kidnapped and pressed into sex traffic trades throughout the world?

And made objects of sexual satisfaction for depraved individuals who may even travel thousands of miles just to have their way with an innocent child like that?

And you tell me there is a good God with all power in heaven who allows this kind of injustice to go on? Can you not see how this can give rise to atheism?

[16 : 56] And can you not see how some might say, well maybe there is a God but if there is, and God allows stuff like this to go on, I don't want anything to do with him, even if he is in existence.

to date we have slain and slain is the word. Slain is the word.

We have slain 55 million plus little unborn lives just snuffed them out either by plunging the scissors into the back of their neck as in an abortion that is in process or a birth that is in process and nothing but the head has presented itself from the womb and the doctor and can you believe they call these people doctors takes a scalpel or scissors and slices it into the back of that little head that has just made its way from the mother's body.

How many times has this taken place? Where is God when this is going on? How can he allow something like that? We've got floods, hurricanes, earthquakes.

Now even as we speak we've got California burning and how many thousands of people have been evacuated from their homes, homes that have been reduced to a pile of ashes because of the Santa Anna winds that cannot be controlled and all of these lives and fortunes and hopes and dreams just gone up in smoke.

[18 : 51] And as you look at the landscape about all you can see standing are the chimneys that belong to the fireplaces in those homes and all the rest of it is just a pile of ashes.

Where is God? And if God is not to be blamed in what way is he not to be blamed?

If God is not to be blamed for his commission then is he not to be blamed for his omission for not intervening when these things take place.

I mean after all how much effort would it take on the power of someone who possesses all power to intervene in these circumstances?

if God is not at fault who is and is whoever that is more powerful than the almighty?

[20 : 06] Almighty is perhaps a title not really belonging to God and if it doesn't then to whom does it belong? I can promise you this the only consistent answer to the problem of evil coexisting with the benevolent loving God is found in the Bible and only in the Bible you will not find it in any encyclopedia or in the astute writings of any philosopher however learned and however well read you will not find answers to these problems we have just described anywhere other than in the scriptures and everyone who names the name of Christ should be very familiar with this answer and is actually under obligation to be able to express it and I would ask you the question right now can you and

I would hope that the information that I am sharing with you now is not going to be brand new eye popping information or revelation I would hope that it is nothing more than a review an addition to what you already know you do already know these answers do you not I would hope so because as a believer we are obligated to have answers to these questions they are legitimate questions they are honest questions that are being asked where is God now of course we can always respond with an answer that maybe is somewhat unsatisfactory ultimately it is the best answer that there is but it may not be well appreciated so we have to add some other ideas and facts to it but as has been expressed I think in more occasions than one when somebody cries out for answers and says where is

God where is God when my son lay dying as a result of being crashed into by a drunken driver where was God when my son was dying from that kind of a scene and by far and away the best answer that we can give is that God is in the same place that he was when his son was dying but that often is not really appreciated all that much by people although it is a good and truthful answer atheism atheism is not only induced by the reasons we are giving for it it is likewise induced by an act of one's personal will and here is where we're getting into the thick of the subject matter for this morning because this is what the Bible presents as the solution if you will or at least the explanation perhaps better than the solution as to why bad things happen to good people and why

God seemingly is uninvolved and does not intervene and is a God of far off either doesn't care or he isn't able these are the things that people are struggling with and you know God has given us minds to engage in thought processes and to formulate data and conclusions and ask these kind of questions and it is only a person who is so dull of thinking who has never asked himself these kind of questions and I suspect there aren't all that many of us because most of us are gifted and blessed with what we would call at least average intelligence and that is more than adequate it is true that to some particularly to atheists who are fully committed to the absence of

God our answer this morning is going to come across to them as a cop-out but these people these are people who will remain unsatisfied no matter how compelling the answers are in other words there are some people who are implacable they cannot be satisfied with any answer and one in the scientific community I guess I would say kind of let the cat out of the bag I cannot recall this name offhand but I'm sure you could google it and find out and he made the statement as a scientist which I think was quite telling when he said no I don't believe there is a God and I don't want there to be a God kind of gives one away that that is the human will speaking and that is the thing with which we are going to concern ourselves now and it is not a new topic to many of you but it is a topic with which we need to be readily familiar because we all have one and we all use it for good or for ill and it is called our volition it is the human will that is speaking

[26 : 01] Pascal whom I quoted earlier put it this way there is evidence enough for those who wish to believe but there will never be sufficient evidence for those who do not wish to believe and I have shared with you before which I think is pertinent to this subject the comment by Bertrand Russell when he was asked and by the way Bertrand Russell was a man of towering intellect I guess we would put him in the genius category very very intelligent prolific author philosopher statesman committed atheist and when he was asked in an interview one time suppose you were wrong Mr.

Russell and you stood before your maker one day and he looked at you and said Bertrand Russell why did you not believe what would you tell him and the answer he mustered was I would tell God

you did not give me enough evidence I suspect that's the best he could do but then again I have to ask the question how much evidence is enough and for those thoroughly committed to the idea who are coming from the world view and they have factored in all of their agenda and belief systems and ideas and everything into the idea that there is no God you can't provide evidence that will satisfy them because it would jar their whole position their whole world view their whole thinking apparatus and they just will not accommodate it so marshal all of the evidence you will and it will not be enough someone has said a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still and there's a lot of truth to that as well so the will is the thing that really comes into play here and it is something that we need to fully understand we are of the opinion and I think it is more than opinion I am convinced that it is biblically based although I do not find a chapter and verse that states this specifically yet when God created Adam and Eve we are told early on in Genesis that he gave them dominion that simply means they were put in charge of everything of the whole earth and of all animal biological life in it they were in charge they had dominion over the earth and everything that it concerned all of animal life and he embedded them if you will with this thing called a human will and we've explained in time past I'll be as brief as I can now but it's important it needs to be in the mix God was confronted with a choice he either made angels and humans with the inability to cross him so that they could not disobey so that angels and men whenever confronted with any kind of a decision always had to make the right decision because it was the only one they could make they had no choice in the matter in other words they had no will they were pre-programmed to always do the right thing

God could have done that he could have made them that way and some rather suspect that he should have because they reasoned this way you mean to tell me that this God who was supposed to know everything that he knew well in advance because he does know everything that this was going to be a world of woe and misery and death and injustice and brutality and he went ahead and created people who were capable of that anyway what kind of a God is that we heard earlier from Ephesians 1 that this God does all things after the counsel of his own will and one gets the impression from that text and from others that support it that God is virtually what shall

I won't say unopposed but I would say unsuccessfully opposed by any opponent that comes against him be it Satan Lucifer however you want to call him or humans or Adolf Hitler or Joseph Stalin or anybody else they may oppose the Almighty but nobody has ever overcome him so why didn't God make people that way why didn't he make angels that way well what challenge would that be as we pointed out if people are constructed in such a way that they do not have a voluntary will that they just automatically have to do the right thing where is the value of that kind of obedience where is the credit for obedience there isn't any credit to be given there isn't any demerit to be given either because they just are locked in to always doing the right thing so God did not do that he created them with volition and for lack of a better term because this could not have blindsided the Almighty for lack of a better term

[32 : 20] I will use it just because I'm trying to communicate as a human to humans there's an element of risk in that I cannot believe the Almighty saw it as a risk at all God is not in heaven walking around scratching his brow saying oh good grief now look at what the USA has done now look at what France has done and I hadn't counted on this I didn't know that so and so was going to do that no no no no that stuff God is omniscient that means there isn't anything that escapes him he's never been surprised by anything and he is not the kind of deity that the old deacon referred to when he prayed before the congregation now Lord you no doubt saw the paper this morning no God didn't see the paper this morning he just knew what was in the paper before the paper was the paper you know so God isn't blindsided about anything he's fully aware of this and he knows what's coming so what are we going to do about this thing called volition when Adam and Eve disobeyed

God they took unto themselves something that God did not place in their nature and in their being and this thing is called sin or disobedience and it was a result of their being created if you will in this status of neutrality where they could go either way angels likewise and as soon as they chose to disobey God they not only took unto themselves something that they didn't have which they would inevitably pass on to the next generation which would pass on to the next generation which would pass on eventually it gets to us and this is called our fallenness and it is endowed with self centeredness in our will and it is also endowed with a fallen intellect

I do not know to what degree we would classify Adam and Eve as extremely brilliant but I am satisfied just from a wise man opinion that they were a whole lot smarter than any of us here but

they lost that capacity too and along with that they lost something else they lost their dominion man still has a certain amount of leverage and dominion over the earth but you better believe it is limited we do not exercise complete control if we did California fires would have been put out a long time ago and the earthquakes and tsunamis and the tornadoes and all of those things would have been held in check or would never have happened but we don't have that kind of power we don't have that kind of dominion over earth I am satisfied that originally it was there but dominion was not only lost over all biological life and animals it was lost over the very elements itself man is no longer in charge of the rainfall he's not in charge of the ocean waves he's not in charge of any of these things it's like they're out of control we say they are acts of nature they're out of our purview we cannot control them we build dams and we do the things to counteract them but they are only minimally successful because we've lost that that's part of the fall this will thing so when

God gives us the capacity for moral choices an ability to do right and an ability to do wrong that very capacity becomes the vehicle or the avenue or the means by which we are held accountable if we did not have this volition thing then there would be no basis for our accountability for our ultimate judgment but there is one day going to be a great assize there will be a time of accounting and more than anything else this accounting is going to be held and evaluated on the basis of what you did with the will that you had the free will that you had you are a free moral agent you can choose to do good you can choose to do ill that becomes the basis that will condemn us or reward us that is what it means to be a human being animals are not endowed with this animals are endowed with instinct so that animals kind of do automatically what animals do they are pre-programmed and animals do not have the kind of will and volition that we do a mama bear doesn't have the same ability that a human being has to say no to the opposite sex she's programmed to cooperate and she does and she has baby cubs and it's kind of automatic and it's natural because they're just doing by instinct what animals are programmed to do we are not programmed that way we are endowed with that thing called a will be careful how you use it it's going to be the basis for your being accountable this the

Bible sets forth with such great clarity I do not understand how anybody could miss it in fact among Christians I don't know that anybody does miss it but it needs to be reiterated time and again and it is the only real solid answer that is given and it is given only in the Bible that accounts for human nature and human behavior and the way people are you will not find this solution you will not find this answer anywhere else it's only in this book and it explains it this is why the world is the way it is this is why man is the way it is and I suppose the atheist would come back with something like this so what you were saying then is that death and torture and injustice and forest fires and hurricanes and tornadoes and human brutality you're saying it's all our fault yeah that's exactly what we're saying it's our fault it's not

[39 : 46] God's fault it's our fault but who wants to take the blame for that so we engage in blame shifting and we say where was God this almighty powerful God he either doesn't care or he isn't able I don't know which it is but in either case it makes him look pretty bad and I wouldn't want anything to do with a God like that Christians need to be able to articulate these answers this information about the human volition it is what separates us from animals that do not have a volition we are made in the image and likeness of God an awesome thought and I be the first to admit I do not understand what all that means but I do know one thing it comes with a tremendous kind of opportunity responsibility and responsibility that animals don't have we do we have a level of accountability that is charged to us and we will one day give an answer for the decisions that we make it is not

God through his hiddenness or lack of involvement that is responsible for all of the ills that come upon this world and you know let's let's look at this as objectively as we can I am not saying that there are no times when God does not intervene we know all through history and we know from the biblical record that there are plenty of times when God has intervened God has stepped in and provided miraculous situations whereby the course that was underway was short circuited but there are so many times when they are not and we must also be honest and say there are probably plenty of times where God has providentially protected us and provided an out for us in ways that we didn't even know or understand there have been times probably when we have been rescued from circumstances and situations that we weren't even aware of but God was now how and why he does these things and why he chooses to intervene in some and not in others especially if you have a lot of people praying about it we don't know we don't know all we know is that God does work all

things after the counsel of his own will and it is the insertion of this concept of our volition our will being functional and active and responsible it is that reality that completely gives the lie to determinism and philosophical determinism says you don't even have a will you just think you do but what you do by what you think is an act of your will is nothing more than deterministic and that you are programmed to do what you do when you do how you do and why you do that's all programmed that's all determinism that's nonsense and some believe and there are actually some of the theological strike that believe that the only way that

God can be sure that things are going to turn out the way he wants is if he sees to it and he predetermines everything every move you make every response you have every act you're engaged in he planned it and he predetermined it and you may think that you were behind it but you weren't behind it at all you were just dancing like Richard Dawkins says you were just dancing to the music of your genes predetermined how else can God be certain that things are going to be turning out as he wills when he allows humans free moral agency doesn't that mean that God is subject to having his apple cart turned up side down with every new human being that comes into the world

I mean with everybody having this thing called volition how in the world is God going to get what he wants out of all of these billions of people exercising their volition to do whatever it is that they want to do and you tell me that in a mix like that God is going to work all things after the counsel of his own will that does seem completely contrary doesn't it well it does except for one thing and that is this it calls for a God who is a lot bigger a lot smarter and a lot stronger than anything that we can imagine and I think that's the kind of God we serve theologically I guess it would be a piece of cake if God just automatically programs everybody to do everything and then aha yes it all turned out just like I thought why shouldn't it

I provided all the ingredients I made all the decisions for people that they just thought they were making but I was making them so then ultimately you have to charge God with being responsible for the abortions and the rapes and the injustice and everything because these people were programmed to do that and God was the one who programmed them that's nonsense not only is it nonsense it is insulting to the most high I am suggesting that we serve a God of such a magnitude that he is more than capable of taking the ingredients that every fallen nature volitional being makes and work them together in a mix that is absolutely incredible so that it all still turns out to be just what he wants how could he possibly do that you don't have any idea but that's part of his job description and let me tell you something he's up to it that's the

[46 : 59] God we serve so all of your disappointments all of your deprivations all of your trials and troubles and experiences that are negative and all the rest of it they all factor into this one grand scheme that God is operating and the time is going to come when he's going to stand back and say it all turned out just like I planned and that is going to be taking into consideration all of the right things I ever did well that's not hard to believe but it's going to take into consideration all of the dumb things I ever did and all of the sinful things I ever did and they are all part of the mix and it's still going to turn out to be what he wants it to be for his glory that is incredible that's the God we serve that is a God without limitation and you know only with an understanding like this only with an understanding like this can you have any confidence at all in

Romans 8 28 think about that concept in that verse where God works all things together for our good for those who love God who are called according to his purpose that is as true as the day is long as true as God is God and it doesn't make any difference how much it hurts how great your pain is how great your disappointment or your sorrow is it doesn't make any difference that you are going blind and there's nothing that the doctors can do about it makes no difference that you have to bury your grandchildren or your great grandchildren that too is in the mix God is able to factor all of these heartaches and all of these things together so that in the end there really will be a time of rejoicing and thanksgiving even in the midst of all the pain and all the ugly things that go on