

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Reasons to believe

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Introduction

There are many things in life, which we choose to do – or not do – and it does not really matter. You may choose to enjoy a style of music or you may choose to hate that style. But in the end music style is just an individual choice and it doesn't really make much difference what we choose.

We make hundreds of choices all the time – and in the end the consequences are very little – will I have the chicken pizza or the beef, will I visit a friend or not. Some decisions however are much more important. Like the decision to marry or not to marry. But the most important decision – yes the most important decision any of us will ever make – is whether we believe in God or not.

Stay with us this morning as we reflect on the fact that many people do not believe in God – but that may not be the wisest decision and may have greater consequences than we ever imagine

Part 1

We have just returned from a week's vacation and conducting a wedding in Fiji. When holidaying there are always wonderful things to do and see; new people, new sights, new food, new words, new experiences and for me new parables for life.

One highlight was a day trip we enjoyed to an island and coral reef. The price was reasonable though my inherited Scottish reluctance to spending money caused annoyance when I realized the cost included free beer. I calculated that my not drinking that day would mean I was subsidizing everyone else.

While relaxing at one point in the day I could not help but notice the family at the table next to us. Grandma and mum were both enjoying the free beer side of the day. Their daughter/granddaughter was, I guess, about three years of age - though she may have been only two. At one point she became thirsty. The mother handed a small glass bottle of beer to the three year old, who proceeded to grab the stubby with both hands. And then with quite a lot of care and some supervision from mum and grand mum the little Australian tourist child began to enjoy quite a few sips of fresh Fiji Bitter. I must admit I really could not believe what I was seeing. After a while the child just began helping herself.

What staggered us more was what happened next. After a while the mother stopped this behaviour and took the child, who I thought was about three, into her arms and began to breast feed her. What an irony that the mother still thought her child young enough to not be weaned from breast milk but old enough to be introduced to alcohol. Now wonder the old book describes those who have no knowledge and love of God as lost. Being separated from God has greater consequences than we can ever imagine and those consequences pass down the generations.

We live in a world that believes that God is an optional extra for the weak and needy. The deadly truth is that without God we are lost. Sometimes the picture of our being lost without God is stark and real. But often we miss the evidence in a blur of entertainment, activity and noise. But without God we are still lost. Praise God that he sent his Son Jesus to seek and save the lost.

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." Luke 19:10

Part 2

Recently, ABC interviewer, Andrew Denton, host of the program "Enough Rope", made an interesting admission. On his program he interviewed three ministers of religion: a Catholic priest, an Anglican minister and a Uniting Church minister. While advertising the program in a promotional interview on radio before the TV show, Denton was asked about his own beliefs. He honestly admitted that he was an atheist. The radio interviewer tried to encourage him to take a more middle-of-the-road alternative, and encouraged him that he would be better adopting the more conciliatory position of agnosticism (ie. being unsure of the existence of God).

Denton's reply was fascinating for two reasons. Firstly, he replied that if he did not believe, then there was no use pretending to be unsure. After all, he figured correctly, if there is a God and he is all knowing, then there is no point trying to put on a pretence, as God could not be conned. But Denton's second admission was even more revealing.

While atheism defined his ignorance, Denton admitted, in his words, "I don't have a better answer." It was a rare and truthful recognition that to believe has its difficulties, but to not believe does not solve all the difficulties. Indeed it only adds more. How does an atheist explain the beauty and confronting sensory fact that this world seems to have the stamp of intelligent design rather than chance mutation? How does an atheist cope with the evil that seems to tempt, challenge, seduce, and at times, engulf human goodness? What hope of rescue, redemption and renewal can the atheist offer? Finally, there is the eternal uncertainty, the cosmic loneliness and the devastation of death and oblivion that atheism stares at without answer, explanation or hope.

Atheism is exposed with all its weakness as it tries to deal with death. Years ago an honest atheist reminded me, as I conducted his son's tragic funeral service, that I had better have some answers; for he sure did not! Indeed the rise of mediums, "speaking with the dead" and an interest in reincarnation, are all superstitious expressions of the fact that atheism does not provide the answer.

I know that faith in God provides challenges and uncertainties. To live by faith in a world of material certainties will always present difficulties. To take the old book as a divine instruction manual is not without challenge. To meet God in the sacrificial life and person of Jesus does stretch our understanding. To believe that heaven is a real gift of a creating, forgiving and restoring God does require thoughtful humility and trust.

Atheism is the simple default position caused by our eyes and ears, but in the end it fails to answer our most basic questions of meaning, identity, purpose and hope.

"Simon Peter answered Jesus, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (John 6:68, NIV)

Part 3

Like a lot of people I grew up with the view that the evidence was pretty clear – that God was at best a mild possibility and most likely just not real. I was not a great science student so I can't really say my view was based on science. No I guess it was just the vibe I picked up. At school, on the TV, in the paper and amongst my friends God was unlikely. Like many I punted for agnosticism. I did not have the time or desire to prove that God did not exist, so it was easy to just say I was not sure.

What I did not know was that people like Dr Antony Flew shaped my adolescent ideas. Flew has been one of the great intellectual atheists. One US newspaper described Flew as, "a British philosophy professor who has been a leading champion of atheism for more than a half-century." Indeed Flew has debated many Christians over the decades to attempt to debunk their foolish beliefs. Some have described Flew as the "Billy Graham" of atheism. Not just sure in his own disbelief he has always been zealous to try and convince

others. Flew was the son of a Methodist minister and became a committed atheist at aged 15. His views and those of people like him underpin the agnosticism and atheism that remains so prevalent today.

When I became a Christian as a young adult I became convinced that God was real and important. For me the key was the person of Jesus. I became convinced that he existed in history; that his death, a hideous unjust crime, actually happened and had a purpose in offering me forgiveness for my sins. I came to see that Jesus' resurrection was the most likely explanation for the facts. In short, I came to believe that the old book, the Bible was reliable at revealing truth and a roadmap for peace with God. So my conversion was complete and agnosticism was abandoned. A new conviction of truth however also included doubt. "Why do so many still reject God"? "Why does it seem the prevailing view is still against the existence of God, when I now believe the evidence is so convincing?" "Why are people so bedded in an atheistic Darwinianism when my senses bombard me with a creation with such design?"

Well would you believe that at 82 years of age the atheist Antony Flew has changed his mind? After 67 years of zealous atheism Flew has now adopted a view that the world was created by an intelligent design. Flew would not describe himself as a Christian but rather as a theist (a believer in God) or maybe even a Deist like Thomas Jefferson, whose God was not actively involved in people's lives. But the fact that Anthony Flew has finally seen the folly of atheism is incredible. We can only hope that these academic paradigm shifts will one-day filter down into popular perception.

Belief in God may well be making a very overdue comeback.

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." Psalm 14:1

Conclusion

It's never too late to change your mind – and come back to God. It's the simplest and most profound thing we will ever do

It starts by saying: Sorry, Lord for rejecting you and ignoring you

By saying, Thank you – for sending your Son to die to give me life

And by saying, Please – Lord fill me now that I may be a follower and believer.

"Lord we know that many do not believe –that it is **not** trendy or popular or cool or intellectually well regarded. But we thank you that you are still God and you still call us to be your people.

Sorry, Lord for rejecting you and ignoring you.

Thank you – so sending your Son to die to give me life.

Please – Lord fill us now that we may be followers and believers.