

# NICK GUY & THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN HISTORY AFFAIR

NICK GUY, VOLUME 21

## RELEASE DATE:

**THEME:** From the story of Abraham offering up his son Isaac to the Spanish Inquisition; from the stories of violence in the Old Testament to the Salem Witch Trials; from the trial of Galileo to the Crusades, critics of Christianity have pointed to numerous examples of the moral and ethical failures in Christian History as reasons to dismiss the Christian Faith as a religion of slavery, violence and exploitation. So much so, that one Atheist Critic, Christopher Hitchens, went so far as to say that Christianity poisons everything it touches. But is this assessment accurate? Do the critics of Christianity present a clear and honest picture of Christian History? A closer examination proves that they don't.

## OLD TESTAMENT VIOLENCE - CONQUEST OF THE PROMISED LAND:

Atheist Critics of Christianity claim that the Church has a long history of violence, and much of this can be found within the pages of the Old Testament itself. In his bestselling book, *The God Delusion*, atheist Richard Dawkins refers to the God of the Old Testament and His displacing the Canaanites from the Promised Land and giving it to the people of Israel, as "a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser." Journalist Christopher Hitchens complains that the Old Testament contains a warrant for "indiscriminate massacre." Other critics of Christianity have leveled similar charges, accusing the Christian God of "crimes against humanity." Bill Maher has called God a "psychotic mass murderer."

There are several points that need to be made concerning this assessment. One comes from Christian Apologetist Ravi Zacharias. When asked this question: "How can a God of love and justice allow such evil in this world?" He answers with a question: "What do you mean by evil? Because, if you say there is such a thing as evil, you assume there is such a thing as good. If you assume there is such a thing as good, you assume there is such a thing as a moral law on the basis of which to differentiate between good and evil. If you assume there is such a thing as a moral law you must posit a moral law giver. But that is the thing you are trying to disprove. If there is no moral law giver, there is no moral law. If there is no moral law there is no good. If there is no good, there is no evil. So what is your question?"

He goes on to point out that in these questions, you cannot find an answer if you extract God from the paradigm. When you violate God's law, there is a moment of judgement that comes. Part of that judgement is suffering pain and grief. Sometimes with the elements, sometimes with disease, sometimes with invading armies.

Old Testament judgement is very much in keeping with how God has revealed Himself from the beginning. In the Garden of Eden, He told Adam and Eve that if they ate the

forbidden fruit they would die. There are not the entailments of God, they are the entailments of our choice.

As CS Lewis has pointed out, there are two kinds of people. Those who bend their knee to God and say "Your will be done." and those who refuse to bend their knee to God and God says "Alright, your will be done."

What we see with the Old Testament destruction of peoples is what happens when we say, "My will be done." To not see the entailments of sin is to make sin less than what it is. And to not be willing to face the tragedy of sin is to make us different to who we really are.

**THE TRUTH OF THE CONQUEST OF THE PROMISED LAND:** Atheist Richard Dawkins has called God's removal of the Canaanites from the Promised Land and giving it to the Israelites as "ethnic cleansing." Like so many of the New Atheist's interpretations of Scripture, it sounds simple and condemning. But, in reality, it displays either an ignorant or disingenuous understanding of the text and context. One cannot separate the story from its explanation. One cannot pick a horrible story out of the Old Testament without accepting its explanation.

A simple reading of Joshua 5:13-15 gives an interesting insight into the Jewish conquest of the Promised Land. It reads:

*"When Joshua was by Jericho, he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, a man was standing before him with his drawn sword in his hand. And Joshua went to him and said to him, "Are you for us, or for our adversaries?" And he said, "No; but I am the commander of the army of the Lord. Now I have come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped and said to him, "What does my lord say to his servant?" And the commander of the Lord's army said to Joshua, "Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy." And Joshua did so."*

From this text we come to see a vital aspect of what unfolds throughout the rest of the book of Joshua. When Joshua met the Lord before the battle of Jericho, Joshua is told that the Commander of the Lord's Army is not under the command of either Israel nor their enemies, but that He Himself is the commander. This emphasizes that Israel is being used by God, not vice versa. God used Israel as His instrument of judgement - just as He would later use pagan nations to judge Israel

Contrary to Richard Dawkin's assertion, ethnicity had nothing to do with the conquest. The Old Testament conquest of Canaan has to do with God's judgement on the Canaanites, and God is using Israel as His instrument of judgement.

**THE CHARACTER OF GOD AND THE INIQUITY OF THE AMORITES:** A charge we hear so often from critics of Christianity is: How could God, who is all love,

call for the extermination of people in the Old Testament? Here is where a bit of understanding of the character of God, and a bit of research into the character of the people living in Canaan at the time is needed to get a fuller understanding of the context.

First of all, God is indeed love. But He is also holy and just. His love never overrides His holiness nor His justice. In fact, His judgement and His wrath are an outworking of His love. God would not be loving if He overlooked sin.

Even with this understanding, many think of the Canaanites as innocent victims in this “ethnic cleansing” of the Promised Land. But is that really the case?

From Scripture itself we know that the sin of the Canaanites was great. The first hint we have of this comes in Genesis 15. Here, God is making His covenant with Abram. One of the things that Abram is promised is that his descendants would be sojourners in a land that was not their own, and that they would be servants in this foreign land where they will be afflicted for four hundred years. He then promised that the descendants of Abram would return to the Land of Canaan, but that it would not happen for four generations, because, “The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” At the time God made this promise to Abram, the people living in the Land of Canaan were not yet so wicked that God would judge them.

God’s longsuffering with the Canaanites is overlooked in the popular Atheist interpretation of the Book of Joshua. God’s holding Israel in Egypt for 400 years displays His longsuffering.

One example of God’s longsuffering is found in Genesis 18 where God reveals to Abraham that He about to judge the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for their sin. Abraham intercedes for the cities, asking God if He would spare Sodom if there were at least fifty righteous people living there. God said that He would spare the city for fifty righteous. His determination to not spare the city tells that there were not fifty righteous living there. In fact, through Abraham’s intercession, we come to see that there are not even ten righteous living in Sodom. Yet, if there were, God would have spared the city.

A basic knowledge of Canaanite culture reveals its inherent moral wickedness. The Canaanites were a brutal, aggressive people who engaged in bestiality, incest, and even child sacrifice. Deviant sexual acts were the norm. The Canaanites’ sin was so horrible that God declared, “The land vomited out its inhabitants” (Leviticus 18:25).

Interestingly, Joshua 2 reveals something very important to us. In this passage, two Israelite spies are sent to scope out the city of Jericho. The spies were greeted by a prostitute named Rahab, who hid them. In verses 8 and 9 we read: *“Before the men lay down, she came up to them on the roof and said to the men, “I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the fear of you has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you.”*

“Fear of Israel” indicates that the people of Jericho knew it was God’s judgement on them and yet they refused to repent.

Another aspect of this story that is important to understand is that the destruction of these Canaanites nations was directed more at their religion (Deuteronomy 7:3–5, 12:2-3) than at the people themselves. Rahab, who hid the Israelite spies, was spared in the destruction of the city of Jericho. She joined herself to the Israelite nation, and so complete was her inclusion that we find her included in the lineage of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Individual Canaanites, like Rahab in Jericho, could still find that mercy if they repented.

God's desire is that the wicked turn from their sin rather than die (Ezekiel 18:31-32, 33:11).

Another key point in properly interpreting the conquest of the Promised Land is that the emphasis was not on killing all the people, but in driving them out of the land. If the Canaanites had fled before Israel, none would have died. There was no command to hunt them down. And, as we just saw, those who repented were welcomed into the nation of Israel.

**WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN?:** One objection that is routinely made is: What of the children who were killed in the conquest of the Promised Land? This is a fair question, and one that is not easy to answer - mostly because we don’t have enough information.

One thing we must understand and accept from the beginning is that God, as the Creator of all people and all things, has the right to give and take life as He sees fit.

Also, if God provided redemption for these children, was it not merciful to them for them to be removed from a sinful situation?

**A CHILLING REMINDER:** Surely, the issue of God commanding violence in the Old Testament is difficult. However, we must remember that God sees things from an eternal perspective, and His ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8–9). The apostle Paul tells us that God is both kind and severe (Romans 11:22). While it is true that God's holy character demands that sin be punished, His grace and mercy remain extended to those who are willing to repent and be saved. The Canaanite destruction provides us with a sober reminder that, while our God is gracious and merciful, He is also a God of holiness and wrath

**HEROES AND ANTIHEROES - LOT & THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM:** Critics of Christianity will many times point to various stories in the Old Testament as examples of not only the violence, but the character (or lack thereof) of some of the “supposed” heroes of the faith. This, they believe, displays an inconsistency with God in that He is found blessing and favoring those who could not be considered “good” men.

Again, a fuller knowledge of God, His purpose, His plan and the main theme of all of Scripture is necessary for us to get a proper understanding of how to interpret and reconcile the ungodly actions of men displayed in the Old Testament.

One particularly popular story that supposedly displays God's hypocrisy is the story of Lot found in Genesis 19. In this story, two angels are sent by God to warn Lot and his family who were living in Sodom, to flee the city before God's judgement fell upon it. The wicked men of Sodom surrounded Lot's door and demanded that Lot send the two men out to them so they may engage in homosexuality with them. Lot, wishing to prevent this, offers his two daughters to the men.

The morality of Lot's action has been criticized by Atheists and used as an example of inconsistency and hypocrisy with God. They claim that since God still spares Lot from the judgement to come, we must assume that He approves of Lot's offer. God is portrayed as a child abuser and a misogynist.

This may appear to be a fair criticism, but it fails to consider one major fact. Just because a story appears in the Old Testament doesn't mean that it carries God's approval. In this story of Lot, Lot is more an anti-hero than a hero. Lot is not spared because of his righteous actions, but actually is spared in spite of them.

One of the dominant themes in Scripture is the wickedness of man and the kindness of God. In Genesis 19 Lot is not approved of by offering his two daughters to the wicked men of Sodom. Lot is saved by Abraham's intervention not his own actions.

**HEROES AND ANTIHEROES - THE BOOK OF JUDGES:** The Book of Judges is filled with stories of immorality, cowardice and foolishness displayed by Israel's heroes. Jephthah, for example, from chapter 11, who was the son of a prostitute, vowed to God that if the Lord would grant him victory in his battle with the Ammonites, that he would offer as a burnt offering the first thing that came out to meet him upon his return home. When he arrived home, his daughter came out to greet him. Is this the kind of thing God approves of? Well, no. Jephthah's actions are not approved of. The Torah allows for the overturning of a rash vow, but apparently this one wasn't.

Does this story reveal God to be abusive, cruel and nasty. No, but it does reveal that Israel was descending into a bizarre kind of religion.

The Atheist will counter with the fact that we find Jephthah's name listed in Hebrews 11, along with other Israelite Judges such as Gideon, Barak, and Samson (Hebrews 11:32), who are all commended for their faith. Each of these men did display faith in God, but they also exhibited serious short-comings like idolatry (Judges 8:27), cowardice (Judges 4:8), and infidelity (Judges 16:1). They are not commended for their failings, but for the faith they showed in God - as inconsistent as it was.

It is helpful for us to consider ourselves when we judge these men. Which of us

would be found pure and faithful to God in all our actions. There has never been a man of God who has been without sin, without those times of faithlessness. Many a mighty man of God has struggled with abiding sin, and have not always been victorious over temptation.

None of the people we have examined in the Old Testament (Lot, Samson, Jephthah, even Abraham) deserved God's favor. - and that's the point. The Bible is clear that no one is righteous, no not one, there is none who does good. None of us deserve God's favor. God's favor is bestowed based on his love and grace.

The whole point of Judges can be summed up by the very last verse in the Book: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

Ironically, this is the philosophy of those who are most critical of the men described in the Book of Judges. To the Atheist, since there is no Objective, Eternal Standard, every man is inclined to do what is right in his own eyes. They condemn the results as horrible, yet don't recognize that it is their philosophy that is the cause.

New Atheists are doing us a deep discourtesy disservice by not reading the Old Testament carefully. God was incrementally humanizing the ancient near east thru Israel

**ABRAHAM OFFERING UP ISAAC:** One Old Testament story that Atheists like to use as an example of the brutality and cruelty of God is found in Genesis 22. It's the story of when God commands Abraham to offer up his son Isaac as a sacrifice to Him. Atheist Richard Dawkins describes this story as "disgraceful" and tantamount to "child abuse and bullying."

To have a proper understanding of this story, one must have an understanding of it's context. Genesis itself tells us that God's command was meant as a test of Abraham's faith. A test he passed.

But this issue of God commanding Abraham to sacrifice his son is still troubling, and one Atheists feel diminishes the character of God. But, without considering the culture in which Abraham lived, a key point to the story is obscured. A point that turns the understanding of the story on its head.

Child sacrifice is abhorrent to us today (except of course when it occurs in the form of abortion - but that's another issue). Actually, it is abhorrent to us because of the Judeo-Christian understanding that this story inaugurates. Child sacrifice at the time of Abraham was quite common in pagan cultures. Abraham was called out of a pagan culture. A command by God that Abraham sacrifice his son would not seem odd to him.

When God stops Abraham from following through with the sacrifice of Isaac, God is demonstrating that human sacrifice is not required in order for men to be reconciled to

Him.

He goes even further in demonstrating that He Himself would provide the sacrifice (something Abraham prophetically stated in Genesis 22:8 - "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering.")

Far from revealing God to be a disgraceful, child-abusing bully, this story reveals a principle that would find its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Man has nothing that he can sacrifice to be reconciled to God. God would Himself provide the sacrifice, the perfect Lamb, Jesus Christ, who would take away the sins of the world on the Cross at Calvary.

**CHRISTIANITY AND SCIENCE:** Most people have the impression that Christianity and Science are at odds, as if the two are incompatible. It has been charged that during the Middle Ages the Church, which held and had a strong influence over political power, was aggressive in stifling Scientific research and discoveries. This is actually not true.

David Bentley Hart, in his book *The Atheists Delusions*, wrote the following:

"Lest we forget, the birth of modern physics and cosmology was achieved by Galileo, Kepler and Newton breaking free not from the close confining prison of faith (all three were believing Christians, of one sort or another) but from the enormous burden of the millennial authority of Aristotelian science. The scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was not a revival of Hellenistic science but its final defeat."

It is popularly believed that the rise of technology and the physical sciences during the period known as the Renaissance was the result of a few brave souls who were able to break through the bonds of the Church to free the mind. This understanding is more myth than fact.

The Guild of Serious Academic Historians, made up of both believers and non-believers, do not talk that way. They recognize that portrayal as being nonsense. More the result of late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Humanism.

It has been claimed that there was a golden age, prior to the Christian age, of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. A free-thinking, idealistic era which Christianity usurped and stamped out. It would take man a thousand years to regain their right to think by linking to that earlier age. But this popular understanding is not at all accurate. First of all, there was no scientific method in pre-Christian pagan antiquity in the sense that we understand that term today. Hellenistic science did have some accomplishments to boast but it tended toward stagnation for any number of intellectual, philosophical or social reasons.

The tradition of the scientific inquiry, which includes empiricism, collection of data and experimentation, came about in the late Medieval culture among Christian scientists.

Ironically, the culture of free inquiry that was present in those Medieval Universities of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century is not present today. Ideas are not freely discussed as they were then. Today, due to political and social pressures, any scientific theory that hints at being connected to Christianity is quickly dismissed and banned. The most obvious example is the exclusivity of the Theory of Evolution in the Public classroom. Creationism is denied entrance, not because it can be refuted with empirical evidence, but because it is supported by the Bible.

**ILLOGICAL, UNFOUNDED ASSERTIONS:** The Atheist World View is based upon Naturalism. Naturalism is the belief that everything that exists came into being through purely natural causes. The supernatural is denied, so therefore any explanation for the existence of the universe that involves the supernatural or a supernatural being can be, must be, dismissed. The Atheist will mock a belief in a transcendent God who created all things, saying they believe in facts and base their understanding on logic and reason.

But, there is nothing inherently reasonable in the conviction that all of reality is simply an confluence of physical causes, without any transcendent source.

Famous New-Atheist writer Richard Dawkins has written: "Natural selection is the ultimate explanation for our existence." His followers are likely to applaud and accept this statement as truth. But either Dawkins does not understand the words he is using or he is deliberately attempting to deceive his opponents into silence. Natural selection is a way of explaining how things have come to be in their present form, not how they originally came into existence.

David Bentley Hart, in his book *The Atheists Delusions*, brings up a very interesting point. The Atheist will call religious belief superstitious, and their own belief in materialism logical and reasonable. But, as Hart points out: "One can also, however, and with perhaps better logic, conclude that materialism is a grossly incoherent superstition; that the strict materialist is something of a benighted and pitiable savage, blinded by an irrational commitment to a logically impossible position; and that every "primitive" who looks at the world about him and wonders what god made it is a profounder thinker than the convinced atheist who would dismiss such a question as infantile."

**THE DARK AGES:** Every new era tends to portray the era it replaces in a negative light, exaggerating the evils of that era so that the new era appears to be much greater and better. Thus the period between the 6th to 13th centuries have been labeled the "Dark Ages" by the era that followed it.

The "Dark Ages" have been portrayed as a period of intellectual darkness. The time after the fall of the Roman Empire and before the rise of the Italian Renaissance.



Although still popularly used, the term is not used by serious historians, considering it misleading and inaccurate.

David Bentley Hart summarized the popular tale of the Dark Ages in this manner:

Hence Modernity's first great attempt to define itself an Age of Reason emerging from and overthrowing an age of faith, Behind this definition lay a simple but thoroughly enchanting tale. Once upon a time, it went, Western Humanity was the ward of Mother Church. During this age of faith, cultures stagnated, science languished, wars of religion were routinely waged, witches were burned by Inquisitors, Western Civilization labored in brutish subjugation to dogma, superstition and the unholy alliance of Church & State. All was darkness. Then, in the wake of the wars of religion that had torn Christendom apart came the full-flowering of the Enlightenment and with it the reign of reason and progress, the riches of scientific achievement and political liberty and a new and revolutionary sense of human dignity. The secular nation/state arose reduced religion to an establishment of the state or, with time, something altogether separate from the state, and thereby rescued Western Humanity from the blood-steeped intolerance of religion. Now, at last, Western Humanity has left its non-age and attained to its majority in science, politics and ethics. The story of the travails of Galileo almost invariably occupies an honored place in this narrative as exemplary of the natural relation between faith and reason, and as an exquisite epitome of scientific reason's mighty struggle in the early modern period to free itself from the tyranny of religion. This is, as I say, a simple and enchanting tale easily followed and utterly captivating in its explanatory tidiness. Its sole defect is that it happens to be false in every identifiable detail. This tale of the birth of the modern world has largely disappeared from respectable academic literature, and survives now principally at the level of folk lore, intellectual journalism and vulgare legend.

Hart goes on to describe the truth of this period:

Admittedly, the early Middle Ages were a surpassingly harsh period in Western European history. As the Western Roman world gradually dissolved - as a result of mercantile, military, cultural, and demographic decline, and as successive immigrations and occasional invasions of "barbarians" continued to alter the shape of Western European society, and as agrarian economies gradually replaced urban, and as successive plagues and famines exacted their toll - there was a prolonged period when many of the achievements of classical antiquity were largely lost in the Christian West (though not in the Christian East), and the monasteries became the sole repositories of what remained of ancient learning. But the Middle Ages as a whole, especially from the time of the Italian Renaissance of the late 7<sup>th</sup> and early 8<sup>th</sup> centuries, were marked by considerable dynamism, in the arts, scholarship, engineering, agronomy, architecture, law, philosophy, and natural science, despite economic and material adversity of a sort now hard even to imagine. Perhaps

most importantly, few historians of science now endorse a “catastrophist: account of nascent modern science - even those who believe in a great scientific paradigm shift at the dawn of modernity - instead tend to acknowledge the continuity of scientific inquiry from the High Middle Ages through the modern period, the technological advances made by medieval society, both early and late, and the first stirrings of a genuinely empirical scientific method in late medieval scholastic thought.

**THE INQUISITION:** Nothing quite delights the heart of the Atheist like mentioning the Inquisition. And for good reason. It remains a truly dark spot in Christian History. But, much to the Atheist’s dismay, the true story is not quite as damning to Christianity as is popularly believed.

During this period the Church exerted a great deal of control over Civil Government, and the Civil Government had a great deal of influence with the Church. This combination did not produce good results. The Inquisition displays the danger of mixing Church & State.

Actually, the Inquisition was primarily motivated by the State. There are numerous examples where Church leaders urged leniency for those found guilty before the Inquisition. Corrupt Politicians used religion for power and political gain.

The Inquisition reveals to us several things that are important to note. First of all, it undergirds a basic tenant of the Gospel. Men are sinners, and, if given the opportunity and without the influence of the Holy Spirit, will tend toward evil.

Also, it must be mentioned that a distinction needs to be made between the evil committed by Christians and saying that Christianity is the source of those evils. It is a question of causality. For the Atheist, any evil committed by a Christian becomes an argument against Christianity itself. But, the Christian who commits evil does so in violation of the doctrines of Christianity, not in accordance with them.

It is ironic that the Atheist will condemn Christianity when individual Christians commit acts that are a violation of Christianity; acts that are completely acceptable within the Atheistic world view. They stand in agreement with the Bible that such actions are evil, and in opposition to their own standard which has no grounds to condemn those actions.

**CHRISTIANITY AND SLAVERY:** The charge is routinely made that the Bible promotes slavery. As we stated earlier, just because something appears in the Bible does not mean it carries God’s endorsement.

When we think of slavery, we are inclined to think of the type of slavery that was practiced here in the United States, where people were captured and sold. This is not the type of slavery practiced in the Old Testament.

In fact, the type of slavery that was practiced during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries in the

United States is actually condemned in the Bible. Exodus 21:16 reads: "*He who kidnaps a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death.*"

Unlike our modern governmental welfare programs, there was no safety-net for those who lived during Biblical times who could not provide for themselves. Rather than starve, one option such a person had was to sell themselves into slavery. Exchanging their labor for food and housing.

Also, if someone owed a debt that they could not pay off, slavery was an option. They would serve in this capacity until the debt was payed off.

Many of the rules found in the Old Testament about slavery were there to protect the slave. For example, injuring or killing slaves was prohibited, punishable even up to death.

In the First Century, when the Church came into existence, those of the lowest social stations had very little legal personality. The slave, male or female, was *non habens personam*: Not having a persona, or not having a face. Before the Law, he or she was not a person in the fullest and most proper sense.

The Atheist may attempt to silence the Christian with this claim that the Bible supports slavery, but in reality, base upon his World View, he should have no problem with slavery at all.

David Bentley Hart made this point when he wrote:

The more vital and essential victory of Christianity lay in the strange, impractical, altogether unworldly tenderness of the moral intuitions it succeeded in sowing in human consciences. If we find ourselves occasionally shocked by how casually ancient men and women destroyed or ignored lives we would think ineffable precious, we would do well to reflect that theirs was - in purely pragmatic terms - a more "natural" disposition toward reality.

To reject, turn away from, or kill any or all of them (homeless, mentally handicapped, disabled, exiles, refugees, fugitives) would be, in a very real sense, the purely practical of impulses. To be able, however, to see in them not only something of worth but indeed something potentially godlike, to be cherished and adored, is the rarest and most unrealistic capacity ever bred within human souls

**CHRISTIANITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS:** But there is an even larger view of Human Rights that is routinely missed by those who are critical of the Bible. Part of this is because we have become accustomed to concept of aid for the poor and treating all men and women with dignity, as if these practices have always been in place. But that is not true.

Christianity brought a drastic change to the world by elevating all men as equal. In the pagan world, there was a clear distinction made between classes of people. Slaves generally had no right at all. Within the Roman Empire, in existence at the time of the early Church, Roman Citizens had rights that were not granted to those who were not citizens.

One privilege of Citizenship was the right to have a legal trial before a proper court in which to defend themselves. Citizens could not be tortured or whipped, nor could they receive the death penalty, unless they were guilty of treason. The Apostle Paul, who was a Roman Citizen, exercised this right in Acts 22:23-29 and was spared a severe flogging.

But the Christian Faith undermined this idea with the proclamation that all men stand equal in the sight of God. It was common for slaves and masters, considering themselves brother, to worship alongside one another in worship services.

Christianity's care for the poor was also revolutionary to Pagan Cultures. The New Atheists accept charity and benevolence as common, but it was not common before Christianity.

Many times Christians who oppose Government Welfare are considered uncaring and hypocritical. But such opposition is not a sign of either. We believe in help for the truly needy, but that the Civil Government is not the most effective means of doing so.

It is often overlooked by the critics of Christianity that most non-government aid in the Western World is serviced through Christian agencies. And that hospitals, orphanages and homeless shelters were all innovations implemented by Christians.

Now, none of this necessarily shows that Christians are better people than non-Christians, but it does belie the claim that we are worse.

**NEITZSCHE'S HONESTY:** Atheist Christopher Hitchens once titled a book - God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything. His view is that the world would be a better place if it were not for religion - Christianity included. But, Atheist German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, most famous for his proclamation that "God is dead," was more honest in his appraisal of what a world without Christianity would look like. He despised Christianity for its devotion to an ethics of compassion, which he saw as weakening to the individual and to mankind as a whole. He certainly saw mankind in terms of "Survival of the Fittest." He never allowed himself to be deceived into thinking that the world could be rid of Christianity and retain its morality - even in a diluted form.

Atheists, by denying the existence of a supernatural Creator, leave themselves with a purely naturalistic framework. While Christianity bases its morality on a transcendent Creator who dictates what is right and what is wrong, Atheism has no such standard. In fact, with no transcendent being proclaiming objective truth, even the terms right

and wrong are not valid.

There is, within Christianity, objective truth which compels us to show compassion and benevolence and kindness. Evil is inconsistent with Christianity, but, *evil is* consistent with Atheism.

The New Atheists will roundly condemn Adolph Hitler and his Final Solution, the socialist eugenics movement enacted to eliminate those he deemed as unfit and inferior. They distance themselves from the reign of Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union, who ruled with an iron fist and eliminated those who resisted his rule. Yet these men actively pursued ideologies and the means to realize them which are consistent with Evolutionary reasoning. Rather than condemn the likes of Hitler and Stalin, these men should be their heroes.

These two modern secular states were responsible for acts of barbarism that far exceed any of the evils Christendom might justly be guilty of.

Consider these statistics. There have only been at least three formally atheistic regimes in world history. Stalin's Soviet Union, Mao Tse Tong's Communist China, and Pol Pot's rule in Cambodia. Not one of these regimes could be considered an improvement over the regimes they replaced.

Stalin killed 20 million of his own people. This is more people each week than the Spanish Inquisition killed in it's 350 year history.

Although the statistics on Mao are not reliable, his government was responsible for somewhere between 10 to 50 million deaths. He is reported to have once said, "We have so many people what difference does it make?"

Pol Pot reportedly took the lives of 2 million out of population of 8 million.

Jonathan Glover, a British philosopher known for his studies on ethics has pointed out that the shared central project of these three regimes was their total redesign of society in ways unrestrained by human feelings or morality. People who did not fit the plan could be redesigned or eliminated.

As David Bentley Hart has written: "Christian society certainly never fully purged itself of cruelty or violence; but it also never incubated evils comparable in ambition, range, systematic precision, or mercilessness to death camps, gulags, forced famines, or the extravagant brutality of modern warfare."

The remedy to atrocities is the exact opposite of what Atheists recommend. It isn't less Christianity, it is more.

**DOES RELIGION TRULY POISON EVERYTHING?:** In 2007, Atheist

Christopher Hitchens published a book with the title: "God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything." This title reveals an issue of integrity with Hitchens that he routinely displayed when he attacked Christianity. While exaggerating the evils done in the name of Christ (the actions not done in accordance with the doctrine of Christ), Hitchens, along with many other Atheists, refused to acknowledge the good done in the name of Christ. This is a problem of integrity because anyone who refuses to concede the good points of those he is opposed to is to be suspect. By saying that religion (or in our case, Christianity) poisons everything, does he really mean *everything*?

If we take Hitchen's charge and confine it to Christianity, does he mean it to apply to medieval hospitals, leper asylums, orphanages, almshouses, and hostels? Does it apply to Biblical admonitions against oppressing the poor, and commands to feed and clothe and comfort those in need? Does it apply to the abolitionist movement and the civil rights movement?

When we consider that the first international aid project in world history (Paul's decade long relief program for famine-ravaged in Palestine) was done by a religious person, and that it was the Church, which inherited the Jewish welfare model, opened up that model to believer and unbeliever alike one has to question the validity of Hitchen's assertion that religion poisons everything, which leads us to question his veracity.

In AD 250 the Church in Rome daily supported 1500 destitute people. By the 4<sup>th</sup> Century Emperor Julian became so worried that the Christians were going to take over the world by the stealth of good deeds that he encouraged pagan priests to try to beat the Christians at their own game. He wrote: "They support our poor as well as their own."

Even today, most non-government aid in the Western World is serviced thru Christian agencies

Now, none of this is to show that Christians are better people than non-Christians, but it does belie the claim that we are worse.

Some Atheists, not willing to deny the good done in the name of Christ, would say that these good things, if purged of the toxin of faith, would have been and would now be even better than they are were it not for religion. But a strong case can be made that most of these things have no existence at all if it were not for Christianity. To assume otherwise is speculation with no solid basis upon which to do so.

**CHRISTIAN MORALITY VS. PAGAN MORALITY:** There have certainly been examples throughout Church History where men have betrayed the morality of the Christian Faith that they professed (it is actually a tenant of Christianity that all men have sinned and missed the mark of God's righteousness, and this capacity doesn't

disappear at the time of conversion), and it must be acknowledged that this charge cannot be laid at the feet of the Atheist, because the Atheist has no morality to betray.

In the early days of the Church, Christians were marked for their sobriety, peacefulness, generosity, loyalty to their spouses, care for the poor and the sick, and for their ability to practice self-restraint, chastity, forbearance and courage. These were things that pagan philosophers frequently praised but rarely practiced with the same kind of faithfulness.

It is undeniable that, throughout history, evil has been committed by Christians. But, Christianity expressly forbids these evils. Whereas it is also undeniable that, throughout history, evil has been committed by Atheists. But, Atheism, in terms of good and evil, forbids nothing. In fact, there is nothing within the Atheistic World View that allows for a differentiation between good and evil. The missing logical connection Dawkins refers to must be that Atheism forbids nothing

Evil is inconsistent with Christian doctrine; evil is consistent with Atheistic doctrine. Tyranny, cruelty and brutality are all consistent with the Atheistic philosophy.

When a Christian loves he does so in accordance with a world view rooted in the Word of God. When a Christian hates he does so in opposition to a world view rooted in the Word of God. What is there in the Atheist perspective that can restrain hate and promote love?

**THE MYTH OF THE TRULY SECULAR SOCIETY:** When Christopher Hitchen's assertion that religion poisons everything is countered with the list of all the good done in the name of Christianity, a common response is that the good done would have been done better without the taint of Christianity. It would be good to consider just how much of that good would have been left undone without the motivation force of the Holy Spirit working in the lives of Christians.

Christianity has been responsible for most of the advances in Human Rights that have taken place since the First Century. Would these advances have been made if not for Christianity? Human Rights cannot be rationally grounded in an atheistic view of the world.

David Bentley Hart has noted:

“What I find most mystifying...is the strange presupposition that a truly secular society would of its nature be more tolerant and less prone to violence than any society shaped by any form of faith. Given that the modern age of secular governance has been the most savagely and sublimely violent period in human history, by a factor (or body count) of incalculable magnitude, it is hard to identify the grounds for their confidence.

“But there is something delusional nonetheless in his optimistic certainty that human beings will wish to choose altruistic values without invoking transcendent principles. They may do so; but they may also wish to build death camps, and may very well choose to do that instead.”

In a society governed by purely atheistic ethics, all distinction between good and evil would be gone. Compassion and cruelty would be equally valid choices. There would be no moral distinction between good and evil. Such a society would be unbearable for most of us.

**THE UNDERSTANDING OF FREEDOM:** In his book, *The Atheist Delusions*, David Bentley Hart defined Modern Culture in this way:

What does it mean for a whole society to be truly “modern?” It has a great deal to do with a society’s understanding of freedom. It must be post-Christian. When Christianity has been displaced from the center of a culture and deprived of any power explicitly to shape laws and customs, and has ceased to be regarded as the source of a society’s highest values or of a government’s legitimacy, and has ceased even to hold preeminent sway over a people’s collective imagination.

Even the most ardent secularists among us generally cling to notions of human rights, economic and social justice, providence for the indigent, legal equality or basic human dignity that pre-Christian Western culture would have found no so much foolish as unintelligible.

The New Atheists seem to believe that secular reason, if finally allowed to move forward, free of the constraining hand of archaic faith, will naturally make society more just, more humane, and more rational. This they appear to believe with no evidence to support such an expectation. It is very difficult to put much hope in this promise when, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the Century when secularization became a political and cultural force, one counts the number of lives that were sacrificed to its principles. In spite of the high cost in human life, not much was advanced by way of new moral concepts. The highest ideals animating the secular project are borrowed ideals.

Those who see Atheism as possessing a workable moral standard upon which to build a society are ignorant of history. They somehow believe that the current moral standards have always been in place.

In the era in which Christianity began, virtues like compassion and mercy were not seen as virtues at all, but as weaknesses. Christianity, and the introduction of the Golden Rule, was very counter-cultural.

The “New Atheists” see themselves as revolutionaries, leading a grand revolt against the tyranny of religion. But, in reality, they are not leading a movement of human



liberation and progress, but a counterrevolution. They are reactionaries, rejecting a freedom which they no longer understand, but upon which they remains dependant.

An Atheist Society would only survive by imitating the strengths of Christianity. Strengths that are inconsistent with its own belief system (i.e. survival of the fittest)

**CONCLUSION - THE GOSPEL:** We Christians must be honest about the abuses that have been done in the name of Christ by the Church throughout history. But our opponents must be honest as well in not misrepresenting those abuses or presenting them as being worse than they were.

As for those Scriptural examples of violence and hypocrisy that are claimed to reflect poorly on God's judgement or character, our opponents must not be shoddy in their interpretation of those Scriptures. If their points are valid and strong, they should not have to resort to poor hermeneutics to refute God's goodness, wisdom and mercy.

All of Scripture, both Old and New Testament, has as it's central point, the person and work of Jesus Christ. All of human history finds its meaning and its hope in Jesus as well.

**RESOURCES:** David Bentley Hart "The Atheist Delusions;" John Dickson, "The New Atheist's questionable history parts 1 & 2"  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3pwNDUgwfM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3pwNDUgwfM)