

Series: *Christmas 2010*

Title: "The Atheists' Christmas Myth"

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 12/26/2010

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Atheists Shoot Themselves in the Feet

During this Christmas season, the American Atheists organization has spent over \$20,000 to put up a huge billboard on one of the busiest highways in the New York City area, and the billboard proclaims that the Biblical account of the birth of Jesus Christ is not true. The billboard proclaims, "You KNOW It's a Myth. This Season, Celebrate REASON!"

The atheists' Christmas billboard is located near the western entrance to the Lincoln Tunnel, which carries over 200,000 people into New York City every day.

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As you might imagine, this billboard has generated a lot of publicity. All of the major news networks carried stories about it. So did many newspapers. And of course, the billboard was featured all over the Internet.

The president of the American Atheists organization, a man named David Silverman, said this in a television interview: "At least we didn't point a gun at Santa Claus's head. Our billboard is the soft approach." But he also said this: "If the religious right wants a war on Christmas, we're going to make sure they know what [such a war] looks like... We haven't [just] started this war. We've been fighting this war for decades."

Well dear friend, let me tell you, the American Atheists have really shot themselves in the foot with this one. They have in actual fact revealed, more than ever before, who they really are, and what they really believe. In fact, what they have done is to provide hard evidence not that the birth of Jesus Christ is a myth, but hard evidence that the Bible is true. By what they have said and done, they have revealed what pathological liars atheists really are. And that is exactly what the Bible says about them. The atheists have in fact confirmed what the Bible says about them.

Now I can imagine that at this point you might be asking, "How can that be?" Well in this message we're going to answer that question, and we're going to answer it from Scripture.

I've titled this message, "The Atheists' Christmas Myth." The American Atheists' Christmas billboard gives us an opportunity not only to examine what is so

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absolutely unsupportable about the atheists' message. It also gives us an opportunity to examine once again the reason for the Christian's faith in the person and work of God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ – the eternally existent Son who came into this world in human form two thousand years ago, to pay the penalty for sin.

The atheists speak of reason. They say that reason and Christian faith are opposites, mutually exclusive. Faith and reason cannot coexist. But what does the Word of God say? Hebrews chapter eleven, verse one: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

Christian faith is *substance*. Christian faith is *evidence*. Genuine, Biblical Christian faith is rooted in reason and logic. Christian faith is not ethereal. Christian faith is not mystical. Christian faith is not pie-in-the-sky. And why is that? It is because of the nature of genuine Christian faith – the fact that it is Christian, it is founded in Christ.

Genuine saving Christian faith has as its object the person and work of God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the substance. He is the evidence. He is the foundation. He is the reason for the Christian's confidence in a perfect life beyond this life of death and struggle. He is the reason for the Christian's confidence in a new perfect earth beyond this ruined and perishing earth. He is the reason for the Christian's confidence of eternal joy and pleasure and fulfillment in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, beyond the sorrows and sufferings and continual frustrations and disappointments of this present life in the dominion of Antichrist.

And so today I want to focus our attention on three points:

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Number one, the atheists' billboard presents a version of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ that is itself a myth. And in contrast, I want to focus our attention on the true account of Christ's coming into this world.

Number two, I want to focus our attention on the true nature of the atheist. The atheist says that he is a reasonable man. But the fact is that by what the atheist continually says and does, he proves what the Bible says about him. And the Bible says that the atheist is the most unreasonable of men.

And number three, I want to focus our attention on the Christian's answer, the Bible's answer, the authoritative answer, to the false claims of those who claim to be godless. *We can* answer with authority.

A Mythical Version of the Incarnation

So we begin with point number one: The atheists' Christmas billboard presents a version of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ that is itself a myth. And in contrast, I want to focus our attention on the true account of Christ's coming into this world.

Now, I want to describe the American Atheists' Christmas billboard for you. This huge billboard portrays a silhouette picture of the three wise men on camels, and the three wise men are approaching a stable in which are pictured Jesus in a manger, along with Mary and Joseph. And there is a star over the stable.

Now, if you know your Bible, you can take one look at this billboard, and you can in one sense agree with the atheists' banner message. They say, "You KNOW It's a

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Myth." And the Christian who knows his Bible can take one look at the picture on this billboard and say, "Yes, you're absolutely right. This is a myth! What you have portrayed on your billboard has practically nothing to do with the historical account that we find in the Bible in Matthew chapter two and Luke chapter two. What you have pictured on your billboard is indeed a myth!" Now, what's mythical about it? Well, there are several things.

Matthew's account says in verse one that "wise men came from the East." But here we have myth number one in the atheists' Christmas billboard portrayal. Matthew doesn't say that there were three of them. In fact, he doesn't say how many there were. And he doesn't say that they came on camels. So the portrayal of three wise men coming on camels is a myth. It is an unwarranted embellishment of Scripture. And Christians who know their Bibles know that it's a myth.

And then we have myth number two of the atheists' Christmas billboard. Matthew doesn't say that the wise men came to a baby in a manger. Matthew says that they came to a house where a young child was. The word that is used in Matthew is a different word than the one that is used in Luke, where Luke speaks of the shepherds coming and finding a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger.

The word that Luke uses is the Greek word for a new-born baby. The Greek word that Matthew uses to describe the Child who has visited by the wise men speaks of a young child or a little boy – a toddler, if you will. Herod had inquired of the wise men "what time the star appeared" – literally, "how long ago did it appear?" And it

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was on that basis that Herod gave the order to slaughter all the young children in the region who were two years old and younger. So the portrayal of the wise men coming to the manger is a myth, and Christians who know their Bibles know that it's a myth.

And then we have myth number three of the atheists' Christmas billboard. Matthew doesn't say that the star was over the manger. In fact Luke, in his account of Christ's birth and the manger, doesn't mention a star at all. But Matthew tells us that the wise men saw the star in the East, and that the star "went before them, until it came and stood over" not the stable or a manger, but the house "where the young Child was." So the atheists' Christmas billboard is factually inaccurate on at least three major points.

But dear friends, let's note something carefully here. Christians have given the atheists a lot of ammunition over the years – ammunition that they fire back at us. How many of our homes have a manger scene with a star over a stable, and three wise men coming to it on camels along with the shepherds? How many church Christmas pageants portray these myths? How many public nativity scenes that Christians have fought so hard to try to keep in public places, how many of them portray these myths? How much of our traditional Christmas music teaches things that the Bible does not teach? All of these things not only confuse the church, they also give occasion to our enemies.

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In a very real sense, Christian friends, we have no one to blame but ourselves. We portrayed these myths in our homes, in our churches, and in the public square long before the atheists ever put them on a billboard in order to mock Christianity.

Dear friends, we need to be so very careful with the Word of God. What does Scripture say? Proverbs chapter thirty, verses five and six: "Every word of God is pure." Every word of God is tested, refined, and demonstrated to be pure and without error. "He is a shield" – a defense – "to those who put their trust in Him." And then notice this: "Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar." There is a very real sense in which this atheist Christmas billboard is a rebuke to the Christian church. You call the atheist a liar? Yes, he is, God says. But look at your own house as well. Look at your own church. Christian church, God says, if you have added to My words, I find you to be a liar as well as well as the atheist. You should be ashamed.

And this is far from the only place in which we add lies to the Word of God. Today churches add works to faith. They add the worship of Mary to the worship Christ. They add social and political reform to the Gospel. All of these things are lies. All of these things add lies to God's truth. They add the word of man to the Word of God. Those who are truly God's people need to repent of these things, and so much more. We need to return to the purity of the unadulterated Word of God, the simplicity which is in Christ.

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The True Nature of the Atheist

Well this brings us to point number two. I want to next focus our attention on the true nature of the atheist. The atheist says that he is a reasonable man. But the fact is that by what the atheist continually says and does, he proves what the Bible says about him. What does the Bible say? The Bible says that the atheist is the most unreasonable of men. Not only that, the Bible tells us that those who claim to be atheists are in fact pagans, and some of the comments by Mr. Silverman of the American Atheists, and representatives of some other atheist groups, demonstrate that this is true.

Romans chapter one, beginning at verse eighteen: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools... [they] exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator [literally, anything that is created rather than the Creator], who is blessed forever. Amen." (Romans 1:18-25)

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Here is what Mr. David Silverman, president of the American Atheists, said in a television interview. He said that the Christians' celebration of the coming of Jesus Christ into the world is just another usurpation of the winter solstice celebration! The atheists' anti-Christmas billboard says, "This season, celebrate REASON!" What "season" are they talking about? They are talking about the winter solstice season.

Atheists around the world celebrate the winter solstice. I recently received an e-mail from another atheist organization that started out with this: "Solstice and Seasonal Greetings! A festive season arrives! As we go along in our annual trip around the sun, the December solstice approaches. For many [of us atheists]...it's a busy festive period."

The winter solstice has in fact long been celebrated, not by Christians, but by pagans. As we look back at the horrors of Nazi Germany, we find that Adolf Hitler reintroduced the celebration of the winter solstice, in place of Christmas, as part of the Nazi culture he intended to impose upon the entire world. Hitler believed that religion had no place in the Third Reich, so he issued an edict that said that celebration of Christmas would be replaced by the holiday of the 'winter solstice.' The Christmas tree was replaced by a winter solstice tree. At the top of the tree was the Nazi symbol, the swastika – in German, the *hakenkreuz*, or the "broken cross" – the ultimate blasphemy against the cross of Christ. And on the godless Nazi winter solstice tree were ornaments bearing pagan, runic symbols and images.

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Mr. Silverman of the American Atheists has revealed what truly upsets atheists about Christmas. They see it as a usurpation of their pagan winter solstice festival, which many of them are more and more openly celebrating. Atheism is in fact paganism – anti-Christian paganism.

You see, what really infuriates the professing atheist is not the idea of belief in a generic god. What really infuriates the atheist is belief in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The atheist, just like the Jewish leaders of a Passover week two thousand years ago, shout out their defiance. They say, "We will not have this man Jesus to reign over us!"

That is the atheists' real problem: The coming of Jesus Christ into the world is not a myth. Atheism is the myth. Atheism is the lie. And deep down inside, the atheist knows it, and he hates the thought, he hates the reality. And so, as Paul says, he will worship and serve anything – anything – but the Creator, because as Colossians chapter one tells us, the Creator and Sustainer of the entire universe is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

The Christian's Answer

This brings me to point number three. I want to focus our attention on the Christian's answer, the Bible's answer, the authoritative answer, to the false claims of those who claim to be godless. You *can* answer with authority.

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The thing that we must remember is that atheism is a belief system. Even the leading atheists admit that. Richard Dawkins says that what really bothers him about Biblical Christianity is the fact that he sees it as a rival belief system, and he wants his belief system to have no rival. Atheism is a belief system. That is what Romans chapter one tells us. And that is how we as Christians must confront it.

How can we answer the atheist with authority? This may seem strange, but we can begin by agreeing with the atheist on one particular point: We can agree with the atheist that "religion" is a failure, and that religion has indeed historically been a major vehicle for evil in the world. History shows us that. But more importantly, that is also what God's Word says about every religion that does not worship the one true God. Such is a complete failure.

But here is where the Bible-believing Christian truly parts company with the atheist: We must disagree with the atheist when he says that belief in the supernatural is the problem.

The real issue, as Romans chapter one tells us, is not that man needs to deny the supernatural. The real problem is that fallen man needs to truly understand the supernatural. And one of the principal things that man needs to understand is that the God of the universe supernaturally came into this world, took on a body, lived the perfect life we cannot live, and died the death we deserved to die for our sins.

That is the Christmas message. It is a supernatural message, and Christians must never be ashamed of the fact that our faith, the saving faith of which the Bible

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speaks, is a reasoned faith in an actual Christ. Dear friend, we can speak to the world about the Christ of Christmas because we have a supernatural Book – the inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God. It tells about a supernatural Creator and Redeemer.

It tells us that the present “natural order” came into existence supernaturally – Genesis chapter one. It tells us that the “natural order” is held together supernaturally by Christ – Colossians chapter one – by Him all things consist – by the rule and authority of Jesus Christ, the One who came into this world in a body of flesh two thousand years ago to redeem sinners – by His rule and authority, at this very moment the universe hangs together and operates.

We need to remember that the atheist, and in fact every unbeliever, is the natural man of 1 Corinthians chapter 2. The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God – in other words, he does not accept them as true. And 1 Corinthians chapter two tells us that apart from the working of the Spirit of God, the natural man is incapable of understanding such things, because they are spiritually discerned.

We must point the atheist – we must point every unbeliever – to Jesus Christ, who is God incarnate, the One who, as Colossians 1:15 tells us, is the exact image of God the Father. Jesus Christ is the One who, as the Gospel of John tells us, exegetes or explains God the Father to man.

But we must couple all of this with prayer, because all the evidence in the world, and all the argumentation in the world, will not bring any person to belief unless the Spirit of God regenerates him.

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No witness to the atheist, no witness to anyone apart from Christ, is complete without prayer – prayer that God the Holy Spirit will bring that person to saving faith in Christ. I think one of the most powerful things you can do is to tell the atheist that you are praying for his salvation.

Our job is simply to bear witness to the Word of God, and the testimony of Jesus Christ, and leave the results in the hands of the sovereign Spirit of God. Dear Christian friend, at this season of the year and in every season of the year, may you be fearless and confident in your witness, because you rely on the power of the Word of God, used by the Spirit of God, to accomplish the eternal purposes of God.

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