The New Atheism

Part 2 of 2: Challenges to the Existence of God with Darrell Bock, Glenn Kreider, Doug Blount
Release Date: January 2014
Darrell Bock: I have two directions I can go and I’ll put them both on the table so we get them out on the table to be sure we cover them both because if I don’t say it now, I might forget it and that could be dangerous. But one way is to think about your raising issue of design which raises the issue of -- let’s talk philosophically about some of the grounds that people have used to say that God exists.

So someone comes along and they say, I don’t -- even though you’ve just made a point that sometimes revelation is very, very important in these conversations, absolutely. If I’m having a conversation with for whom someone, the category of revelation doesn’t function as a warrant, then are there ways to draw them into that conversation towards revelation? By the way I talked about the existence of God, that’s one category I want to discuss.

Second category I want to discuss is theodicy and maybe this is the place to transition and pull out of the cash and come back to the arguments later. Here’s the point that I want to make that you’re making based on what you’re saying earlier, Doug and that is if there is no basis for morality, if everything is a process of natural processes in a material world, then where is the case for the theodicy argument that the new Atheist makes?

Doug Blount: Yeah, in fact I think this is a critical question. Do you want to go ahead and push at this [Crosstalk]. Well this is a very interesting question. It seems to me that to the extent to which Atheists want to claim that theists have a problem of evil, it seems to me they have a problem of good, as well as evil and this is yet another area where the new atheists part company with Nietzsche and frankly, I think Nietzsche sees things more clearly than they do.

Nietzsche very clearly understands that if you have no God, you have no basis for objective morality. Now Nietzsche’s willing to bite that bullet. He’s willing to give up objective morality and that’s why he writes a book called Beyond Good and Evil. So for him, the concept of goodness is just as vacuous as the concept of evil. So Nietzsche’s quite clear, there’s strength and there’s weakness.

Darrell Bock: So there’s no God, there’s no good.
The Table Podcast  The New Atheism

Doug Blount  Yeah there is no good, and it strikes me that Nietzsche is right about this, but this is something obviously the new atheists want to resist concluding. But again, the point you’re making I think is dead right to the extent to which you deny that there is a God, you’re not entitled to the very notion of evil which is brought to bear in the argument typically from evil against God.

Glenn Kreider  I wonder though to be fair to these guys, I wonder though if the issue isn’t so much that the new Atheist has a problem of not having identification of good or evil as much as it is, an apologetic approach that says you believe that there is a God, you claimed that He is good and we have a world that’s really bad and in fact your book claims that God is endorsing and requiring evil, that he is even -- some of your preachers say, he is the cause of evil and so it’s not so much that I as an Atheist have to defend and define good or evil as much as it is you as a theist, you as a Christian, have a really insurmountable problem here. I think that’s usually the approach they take.

Doug Blount  And I think -that’s a fair point, if they’re willing to bite the Nietzschean bullet on this. If they’re willing to say we completely reject these notions of good and evil and if they’re willing to do that, if they’re willing to take the Nietzschean response, fair enough. I mean I think Nietzsche is consistent; his view is dreadful, but it’s consistent. But if the new atheists want to continue to maintain some kind of objective morality, objective value, objective goodness --

Darrell Bock  And I do make a case for that and some of their arguments.

Doug Blount  Absolutely and I think in some places, not just make a case for it but they protest really strongly that this is…[Crosstalk]. Exactly, and I think to the extent to which they want to maintain that, they’ve got this problem. So if they’re willing to bite that Nietzschean bullet, fair enough. But if they’re not then it seems to me they’ve got a problem here.

Darrell Bock  Now that doesn’t absolve the flip side of the question which you’re raising on theodicy which is the claim that – well, if God has created this kind of world with this kind of mess, if I can kind of popularize it here and characterize it and God is responsible for that -- I’ll put a little touch of sarcasm in here, surely he could have done a better job.
Glenn Kreider: That’s exactly the language…

Darrell Bock: Yeah, if we’re giving him a grade, we wouldn’t give him a passing grade on this. And if you to believe that that kind of God exists who fails so badly at this, that really is inexcusable.

Glenn Kreider: The argument from design is flipped so if there is this Great Designer, then why is there so much bad design Dawkins loves to show examples from the animal world of bad design – he loves demonstrating those. But there’s also -- and I lost my train of thought, so it’s gone [Laughter].

Darrell Bock: I want to keep on the track. Let’s step out of the discussion of the new atheism for a second and say, alright and I’m not transitioning here to this yet but in this particular area, I am. How do Christians respond to that particular line of argumentation against the existence of God? What’s the best way to think about addressing that in your view?

Doug Blount: The first thing I would say is it’s important first of all to think carefully of course about what the scriptures have to say about God’s reasons for allowing evil. To be frank here, it seems what the scriptures basically say is God has chosen not to tell us. It strikes me that this is in fact one of, if not the fundamental point on the book of Job. Job in the midst of incredible suffering cries out to God, “God why?” and God’s response is basically to remind Job, “hey you’re not me. I’m me, you’re not and who are you to think that you would understand if I explained.” Now, I don’t think that’s harsh as it might initially sound because I think underlying that divine response is an invitation to Job to trust God. “Job, you want to understand, I could tell you but you wouldn’t understand, so trust me.”

And I think it’s clear from chapter 42 and the way the book ends, Job gets that point. He says in the end, “I spoke of things too wonderful for me to know.” And I think it’s important to acknowledge up front as Christians, if the question on the table is why in fact does God allow evil? The truth is we don’t know. God has chosen not to tell us and in so far as he has not disclose his reasons, we’re in no position to know what they are but that doesn’t mean we can’t still make some helpful responses.
If the atheist’s response is here, wait a minute I can’t imagine what reason God might have for allowing the world to be as it is, if he is truly all-knowing, all-good and all-powerful. That is what’s known in my discipline is as a noseeum argument. The argument is essentially this, “well I can’t see what the reason would be and if I can’t see it, there must not be one.”

Well, those kinds of arguments are good or bad -are judged good or bad on an individual basis in terms of what it is that’s been claimed one can’t see. I mean if I tell you there’s an elephant in my backyard and you look out noseeum argument to the effect that there’s no elephant in Blount’s backyard is a pretty persuasive argument. Why? Because if there were an elephant there, you’d expect to be able to see it. But suppose I told you that there’s a rare species of butterfly that’s very tiny flying around in my backyard, and there’s only one of them. And you look out and you don’t happen to see it. Well, does that constitute work for the claim that there’s no such butterfly there? No. That’s a noseeum argument, but it’s a legitimate one. Why? Because the thing we’re talking about isn’t the kind of thing you would necessarily expect to have been able to see from my kitchen.

So the question is this, from the fact that we can’t see if that’s true what God’s arguments are or God’s reason for allowing evil is, does it follow that we should conclude that he doesn’t have one? As far as I know, the reasons that an omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good Being might have for allowing evil are not things I necessarily ought to expect to be able to see in the first place.

_Darrell Bock_  
Because my field of vision is much thinner.

_Doug Blount_  
Absolutely. And so just on the face of it, the mere fact that I can’t figure out why God allows some of the things to happen that he does, or maybe most of the things that happen that he does, is not warrant for the conclusion that he’s got no such reasons or even worse that there is no such God. And I think that’s a point worth it making up front. Yeah?
Glenn Kreider  
I would also want to say there Doug, and you would agree, that many Christians have not helped our case by in fact speaking for God or, even more troubling, is attributing to God that which is not good, attributing to God the cause of evil. And we have to be in talking about these things we’d have to be very clear that evil does exist and that evil is somehow part of God’s plan for reasons we don’t understand – he hasn’t told us. But that God was never the cause of evil and making that statement clearly in a world where sometimes, for whatever reason, people are saying the opposite is incredibly important.

And the other thing we’ve got to say as Christian theologians, is that – I mean, I like the way Calvin put it when he said we can know that what happens is part of God’s plan for his world, but why he did such and such, we don’t know so we should shut up. The other thing we can say and Calvin would say something like this too is that if God is good and evil exists, then God will one day do something about evil and that we have an eschatological hope that evil and all of its effects will one day be removed. So there is a redemptive work of God and that he is acting redemptively in the fallen world. Now we’re back to [that] there is good in the mist of the evil. That I think needs to be emphasized as well.

Darrell Bock  
You’re sparking so many different questions all at once and let me try and go at two real quickly. I do think there’s an inherent, another inconsistency like we saw in theodicy and this conversation as well, and it goes like this. The very freedom to disagree and reject and walk away from God that you are uncomfortable with or that you want to actually affirm by your life is something that is a part of our world. And if we have the God that you think we should have, I wonder if he would give you that space. You get what I’m driving at?

Doug Blount  
Absolutely.
And that, Darrell, it’s another constant theme in these guys is the degree to which religion has been used to remove freedom, has been used to oppress, and had been used to destroy. I think it’s a real sense that Nietzsche is a good place to start the description of new Atheism, but 9/11 set this trajectory in a whole new path and that over and over again, Harris and Hitchens and Dawkins, I think Dennett does too- but keep coming back to what we saw on 9/11 is the danger, the threat to freedom and the life on the planet when a religion has the ability to treat others in way which, not only removes their freedom but destroys them and that fear of totalitarianism, that fear of religion and we talk about how Christianity, that’s not Christianity, that’s not the God we worship and serve, but that really is a major factor that’s driving their thinking.

So part of what I’m hearing you say, if I can parse what you’re saying to certain degree is that when we allow the discussion to be about religion in general, we lose the ability to particularize about the differences between faiths as we talk about Theism versus Atheism and that actually is a very important part of this conversation, to not lose that differentiation that exists within Theism on some of these themes.

Yeah, we don’t want to have the conversation in a way it’s Atheist against all religions. Christianity is not just one of many religions.

Yeah, Glenn I appreciate the point you’re making but it strikes me a point worth making as well is this one: Is it true that horrible things have been done in the name of religion? Of course it is. And is it true that there are some horrible things that have been done in the name of Christ? Absolutely. But let’s not pretend there haven’t been horrible things done in the name of Atheism. If what we’re concerned about is the potential wickedness and the potential horror of totalitarian regimes, let’s not pretend that religiously minded people have the corner on the market with respect to such regimes.
Darrell Bock  

Yeah, I was thinking about this walking over here because one of the quotes I read last night was something to the effect and I won’t get it exactly right but it goes something like, “Man has killed his thousands but religion has killed tens of thousands,” that’s the thrust of the quote. And I’m walking over here and I’m thinking, if I look at the record of the last century and I look at the wars that were generated, not for religious reasons but for other reasons, for nationalistic reasons, for racist reasons, just put a whole other set of categories in there. And I’m sitting here saying and the example that popped into my mind was the holocaust.

The holocaust was a product in which religion -- if I can say it this way, was the victim. It took it on the chin in the holocaust because someone was a particular race and held a particular religion, the goal was to wipe them off the face of the earth. And that wasn’t religiously motivated, that was motivated by something else. If we’re going to rank the most horrific things that have happened in our recent memory, certainly the holocaust makes 9/11 pale in comparison. And so, I almost want to reverse the quote in the process. Religion has killed thousands but humanity at its worst has killed tens of thousands.

Glenn Kreider  

And most of these folks would agree with us on that and would repudiate very similarly. So it’s a place where in the midst of a vitriolic attack, in the midst of great conflict to say we’re in the same page here. So none of us wants to be a defender of the misuse of religion – any religion and so we do have some common ground here in which we can stand.
Here’s the second point that I want to make off of what was said, we still have -- I know the philosophical arguments are still sitting out there and we’ve got to talk about how we talk about this in general, so I know I’ve got those two topics left. Here’s the other one: Dawkins makes this argument, he says, “What kind of a god -- this has to do with the portrait of God, what kind of God would engage in a kind of -- and I don’t know what other words to use other than the sadomasochistic commitment to send his own son and kill him, put him on the cross? Why would that be necessary in order to achieve salvation? And I think back to a lecture I gave in New York at Kings College years ago. I was doing a thing on the historical Jesus and someone raised their hand saying, “Isn’t God in a way kind of endorsing a kind of suicide in a real sinister kind of way by sending his son to the cross?” That was the question I was asked. The answer that I gave was, if the cross alone were the event, then you might be able to raise that question but the cross alone is not the event. On the other side of the cross, there’s a vindication and a life that comes out of it. That changes the whole story.

It also changes the story when the act of redemption is seen as Trinitarian act rather than a hierarchical father-son act in which the Trinity is in this together. But I think it also as Christian theologians, we come back to -- it’s a matter of perspective. Another very important way to look at it is the sacrificial act of this one who lays his life down for his enemies and the picture of the atonement we get in the New Testament and the Old is multi-faceted, multi-fold. And that criticism, by the way, comes not just from new Atheist that criticism comes in our day from some evangelicals who criticize the “Divine child abuse.”

Absolutely.

In fact I agree with both those points, but I want to add a third one and it’s this: maybe we should back off from the claim that it is God who sets the terms for redemption. I want to suggest that it’s Adam who sets those terms and thus, humanity.

And what I mean by that is this: Christ’s atoning work in a very obvious sense, it seems to me, involves on doing what Adam has done. What did Adam do in the garden?

So in the beginning, there was Adam.
Doug Blount: Well, Adam in the garden didn’t believe, refused to believe the word of God and not believing the word of God was disobedient. How do you undo that? You undo that by believing the word of God and being obedient in the most extreme of circumstances, which is precisely what Christ did so that maybe we should see ourselves, or certainly Adam, as the one who has set the terms by which atonement must be made so that we don’t weigh this. And maybe we’ll say well, to the extent to which it’s sadistic to require this, the sadists are the ones we see when we look in the mirror.

Darrell Bock: Interesting. Okay, well what has become clear to me given where we are in the time, what we’re trying to discuss is that we’ll probably come back to this topic more than once but let’s deal with two other things.

First the philosophical arguments related to God. We talked about the picture of design. Dawkins has a famous argument that he’s made that says, well if we’re going to engage in infinite regress, who created the creation, then we’ve got to ask the question that who created God. And we’re stuck in a move going backwards. And he has a chapter in which he works through, you said he’s not a philosopher but at least he presents the various kinds of arguments for the existence of God that have traditionally been put forward, arguments from design and such.

And so I thought what better opportunity than sit back and say, all right what are those arguments? Are they able to do anything for us at all? Are they a waste of time? What does one make of the kinds of arguments that you might make about design, demand a designer, and those kinds of things.

Doug Blount: Well, first of all before we start talking about that, let’s not forget to come back to the question, who creates God? Because I don’t want to leave that one undiscussed but that being said, in the interest of time --

Glenn Kreider: So you’re not going to tell us who creates God? [Laughter]

Doug Blount: I’m holding that one for the sequel.

Darrell Bock: We know that Dawkins’ answer is man creates God so you know that’s on the table. [Laughter]
Doug Blount  Yeah. Well, first of all I’m going to restrict myself to one of the most promising current arguments for God’s existence, but before I do that, I want to make a point of just saying, Alvin Plantinga, who’s one of the best known philosophers and happens to be a very committed Christian philosopher but one of the best known philosophers of the last generation famously has an article or a paper out called “Two Dozen or So Arguments for God” and that surprisingly given the title, he thinks that there are at least about two dozen good arguments for God. We wouldn’t have time to discuss anything like the full range of arguments that are at the very least significant --

Darrell Bock  So I want a commitment of a future podcast, we can go through some of that.

Doug Blount  Absolutely, we can do that. But let me just mention one. There are various arguments from design. There is the old fashion watchmaker argument that’s famously put on the table by William Paley, actually it’s probably not original Wood Paley but he is the most famous advocate of it. That’s the kind of argument that was undermined by Darwin and which Dawkins has in his sites when he writes the book The Blind Watchmaker, but that’s not the only argument from design. One of the more recent arguments from design that seems to be particularly promising is an argument called “The Fine Tuning Argument.” This argument begins with the acknowledged fact that in dozens and dozens and dozens of ways, the world is precisely the way it needs to be in order for there to be life of any sort, not just human life but life of any sort, whatsoever. The probability of this is astronomically well, the antecedent probability that the universe would be like this.

What’s the explanation of this? Well, there’s a principle of confirmation that says if you’re dealing with two different hypothesis, say a theistic hypothesis and atheistic hypothesis. A set of data will favor the hypothesis on which the data is most likely. Well, if you understand that principle, the fine tuning of the argument seems fairly clearly to favor the theistic hypothesis over the atheistic one. Why? Well precisely because it’s not at all surprising that the world would be fine-tuned if there’s a God; whereas, if there is no God and it just happens to be one of infinitely many possible universes that could have existed, well then the fact that we got these results is pretty surprising.
Then what do you do with the fact that we have a universe out there in which we have lots of worlds that had been around we think as long as we have --

Well I should back up. In the context of the argument when we talk about the universe, we’re talking about the total spacio-temporal continuum, so we’re not just talking about our solar system or our planet, we’re talking about the whole universe. And these facts, these “fine tuning” facts are not simply facts about our planet or our solar system, many of them are facts about the physical nature of the whole, entire physical universe.

The point that I’m trying to make in responding is an anti-evolutionary argument in the sense of, if it’s just a matter of random combinations of things, then why don’t we see it anywhere else? We certainly see the pursuit -- you understand what I’m saying?

Absolutely.

I mean if it just happens to come together in the right kind of way, why do we seem to be -- at least up to this point, the only sphere in which it seems to be happening.

Well there’s a line in Jurassic Park where one of the characters says -- famous line, “Life will find a way.” Well, if unguided life, life that has no purpose and meaning behind it, no designer behind it will find a way, your point is exactly right. Why are we not finding it all over the place? Maybe if it’s true that life will find a way, what’s true is it will only find a way when it’s directed by the right hand.

Okay, let’s -- do you have anything you want to chime in or are we’re going to let the philosopher speak?

No [Crosstalk]. I’m waiting to hear who made God. [Laughter]

I’m on scene of the edge of my seat too so you got a captive audience of two. [Laughter]
Doug Blount: That’s two more than I have ever had before. [Laughter]. Yeah, it strikes me the very question who creates God is -- shows a fundamental lack of understanding on Dawkins’ part of what it is we theists believe. We believe that God by his very nature and you see this as the underlying principle behind the famous ontological argument first put on the table by Anselm of Canterbury but certainly discussed widely the variety of versions of the argument out. But conceptually the God that theists believe in is a God who by his very nature conceptually couldn’t have failed to exist.

So the very question “Who created God?” is ill-formed, as is the suggestion that somehow there’s a complexity here. I mean the theistic notion of God and I don’t want to necessarily remain with the generic theism, Glenn. I appreciated the point you made earlier. Indeed the Christian conception of God is one according to which the fundamental idea of deity is really rather simple. It’s utter perfection so that God is the one who is utterly perfect --

Darrell Bock: And uncreated.

Doug Blount: And uncreated. Well, utter perfection involves not being created, because it involves not dependent on anything other than oneself so that the very concept that theists have in mind, and Christians particularly, have in mind when they talk about God is one that doesn’t have the kind of complexity. We don’t think God is a physical object with a kind of physical complexity. We don’t believe that the God whose existence we affirm is a God whose being involves the kind of complexity or whose existence needs any kinds of explanation along the lines of what Dawkins is seeking. And to think otherwise just misunderstands what it is we affirm when we say God exists.

Darrell Bock: So I’m going to drop one more argument on the table, and then we’ll talk about how to have these conversations. Another thing that you often hear in these conversations is that what Christians do and what theists do is they make God the God of the gaps. They let the evidence go so far and then when the evidence stops and they can’t explain something, it’s the God of gaps. We put God in the gap and that’s it. And what I see Dawkins is trying to do is that, I want to take God out of the gaps. I want to take God out by taking God out, I’m taking God out of the gaps as well. So this is a very famous argument that I think I’ve heard in my own conversations multiple times, particularly when it comes to the science discussions. What are we to make of that argument?
Glenn Kreider

Increasingly, God is no longer necessary in the gaps because increasingly, science has filled in the gaps. And the problem is God is not the God of the gaps; God is the ground of being.

Darrell Bock: He’s the God of the whole.

Glenn Kreider

He’s the God of the whole and many times we have made it easy for -- by we, the generic Christians -- have made it easy by trying to have both so that we can’t explain things according to science, then God becomes the explanation, rather than beginning our worldview perspective with God and building from there.

So arguments for God’s existence, arguments from design, etcetera are incredibly helpful, but none of them are the means by which people come to faith in God. People come to faith in God because of the miraculous work the Spirit does. And I just feel like that has to be a major part of our component of methodology that this is where we started and it’s not to say we don’t have these conversations, we don’t provide evidence and argue from those perspectives. But I read it in Dawkins and I heard Harris say that same thing. People come to me -- Hitchens said the same thing.

People come to me and say why don’t you believe? You ask me to believe in something for which you’ve given me no evidence? But Dawkins said it, I think the best way possible, which you’re asking me to do is to believe to do something that if faith means anything at all, it could only come from the God who I don’t think exists. So if there’s a God, he would have to give me the faith to be able to believe. It’s really hard to state what I believe about saving faith any better than Dawkins do.
Darrell Bock  
Yeah, it certainly is the way Scripture presents it --that God delivers it. I’ve got 25 other questions that I’m going to put on the table, and this is hard for me to do it, but I’m sure those who listening are kind of in the same way. So it’s clear we’ll have to come back to some of this because it’s clear we’ve only just barely scratched the surface but in the remaining time, I want to talk about something Glenn that you wanted us to talk about and that is, how do we have these conversations? What advice and direction would you give in terms of engaging someone who’s coming out of this kind of worldview or perspective? I mean, some Christians I think have the attitude of… someone is so far gone, there’s just -- what’s the point? So what would you say in terms of direction or advice or even things to reflect on as you think about engaging someone who’s coming from this kind of perspective?

Glenn Kreider  
I think first and foremost, we should be people who are aware of what it is we’re talking about and about those to whom we are responding and interacting with. And I think we ought to respond in a most charitable way, although I agree that there’s no objective basis of morality when you remove God from the equation. To say as some have argued, there is no argument, there is no basis when these guys have spent hours and have written page after page after page defending a view, we can say let’s talk about the view you’re presenting rather than being dismissive. And that leads me to the second thing --

Doug Blount  
And let’s talk about the arguments you put on the table rather than simply dismissing your view without considering the reasons you’re putting on the table. We don’t appreciate it when you dismiss us without listening to our arguments, we shouldn’t treat you that way either.

Glenn Kreider  
I’ve read responses to the new atheists that adopt a very similar tone that Dawkins --so one of them was a book that criticized Dawkins for Dawkins’ tone and then responded to Dawkins pretty much the same way. When you’re offended --and we should be offended --when Christopher Hitchens calls Mother Theresa a “fraud” and on the day of his death says Jerry Falwell didn’t believe a word of what he said, he’s a “fraud.” And people turn around and say Hitchens is a “fraud”… Tone down the rhetoric a little bit.
And then I think finally, we ought to repudiate with all the passion we have, the kind of harsh dismissive and even cruel things people have said about -- these are men and women created in the image of God. They are wrong about some very important things, but they’re not wrong about everything. And these are people that Christ loves, these are people that we should love and to write letters or to go -- and to even think, “I hope you burn in hell,” it should bother us that unless God did something for him in the last couple of moments of his life, Christopher Hitchens faces a Christless eternity, that should bother us. It bothers me and I have compassion for that man -- misguided, yes, mean, yes, but a human being for whom Christ died.

And I think there’s a time and a place to argue the case and to present, but the way we do it is maybe more important than what’s -- and then we walk away saying I’m not going to get down and play in your level. I mean, I’m just not going to do it.

**Darrell Bock**

So to pull that all together, you are arguing, and I think this is something we have consistently said in all the areas that we’ve done the podcasts in, is that our tone in reflecting -- the way I’d like to say is, the gospel’s ultimately about an invitation to come back to God and our tone needs to reflect ultimately that invitation.

There’s this wonderful passage in II Corinthians in which Paul says, we urge you, we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. That’s the core tone that we’re after and even though we’re in situations where there’s confrontation, there’s certainly disagreement about ideas. It could be we’re on opposite ends of the spectrum, however you want to describe it. In the long run, the tone you’re trying to do is you’re actually ultimately trying always to extend a hand to that invitation.

**Doug Blount**

Absolutely. It’s interesting if you read the early Christian apologists such as Justin Martyr or Athenagoras of Athens, these are men who are trained in argumentation and you can see when you read them, they’re very skillful at arguments. But in the end, the fundamental case they make for the faith is not an argumentative one. The fundamental case they make is grounded in the life of the people of God.
Athenagoras of Athens says in essence, if you want to see our view vindicated, that we Christians are speaking the truth, watch us live, because we will outlive you, we will out-love you. And I think that’s a very important early Christian theme that we may have lost sight of. It’s not about winning arguments, it’s about loving well and in a way that’s compelling.

*Darrell Bock*

So I’m going to pull a Chris Burman here and go back, back, back, back even before the early Christian and actually come back to Jesus because I think Jesus shows this in his ministry as well. He preaches the word, but what does he do? His ministry is literally loaded with compassion. It’s loaded with compassion to crowds who are coming to him oftentimes just to be healed. They aren’t interacting with the other part of his mission which is saying, I hope you get that my healing isn’t the point here. My healing is pointing to something far more profound, but he still extends the compassion. The early church in Acts does the same thing so there’s a word and deed combination that is consistent and that has a consistency to it, so that when we say God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life for example, we mean it. You can see it in the way we love the people around us. And so the seminary logo, they put it on the end of every one of the broadcast says “Teach Truth and Love Well.” That actually is a very good tag for what we’re talking about here. Tone is extremely important even in the midst of a highly contentious discussion in which we conceptually could not agree more. I find that much of our discourse in the public square has failed badly in that particular area, and what people don’t realize is it actually undercuts the message. It creates static for the message of the extended hand in the invitation of the gospel that we’re trying to offer.

*Glenn Kreider*

Well the other thing it does is it pits personality against personality. You and I are not going to sit and talk to Christopher Hitchens, but we will talk to people who are reading Hitchens. And if we pit one personality against this personality, we end up with two personalities who behave the same way so what? You’re the person who claims you serve a loving God, and you’re behaving like… that inconsistency is a huge problem for us.
Darrell Bock Well, I want to thank you all for taking the time to come in and talk about the new Atheism. As I said, I think it’s clear we’ve done a little bit of work here, but there’s a lot more that could be talked about, there’s a lot more that could be covered. I’m sure I’m going to invite you all back. We’ve got on the table and the shelf too, we’ll work through those philosophical arguments. So Philosophy 101 will gather one day, and we’ll work through those as well. But I really do appreciate you taking the time to help us get our hands around what certainly is a major cultural feature in conversations about God. And we thank you for joining us on the Table where we discuss issues of God and culture.