

I AM

//atheism//

## Let's be honest, when someone says the word "atheist" around Christians, they aren't always met with warm fuzzies. Why is that?

It may have something to do with the decades of misunderstanding and misconceptions piled up against atheists. It might also be because you've heard stories of combative atheists assaulting Christians. The truth is it takes two to tango, and for every combative atheist, there's a Christian in the other corner with weapons drawn. As Christians we're called to share our faith and leave the judging up to God. With the help of Hemant Mehta, author of "I Sold My Soul on eBay," and the blog [friendlyatheist.com](http://friendlyatheist.com), we'll set the record straight on atheism and give you the tools you'll need to have a healthy, informative conversation with an atheist.

### Atheists believe in nothing

Just because atheists don't believe in God does not mean they believe in nothing. Atheism is a system of beliefs, like Christianity, Islam, Jainism, etc. Atheists have just as much faith as any Christian; it's just rooted in a different set of beliefs. For Christians our faith is in God and his power, for an atheist faith comes from different places.

"It's hard to say where my faith lies. I don't think we can have complete trust or confidence in anything. It's easy to say I have faith in love, but breakups happen. I could have faith in science, but the very process of science means what I think now could be modified (albeit only slightly in most cases). I could have faith in myself, but we all know people who are deceiving themselves in one way or another.

So I have to reconcile those differences. I do believe science is the best process we have for discovering the truth about the world. I do think I have the ability to be honest with myself even if that leads to a disappointing conclusion."

### Atheists are amoral

Contrary to popular belief, atheists are not

murderers, baby eaters, or terrorists. As the Friendly Atheist has shown, they are regular people. As Christians, we get our morals from God, but to believe that anyone without biblical knowledge lacks morals is silly. We also pull ethics from our society,

Too many Christians think they have some magical Bible verse that's going to change our minds. It's not

HEMANT MEHTA

environment, socioeconomic class and more, just as atheists do.

"I get my morals from society, from my own upbringing, from my perceived sense of right and wrong. I don't believe in moral absolutes. I believe in the principal that we should all be able to do whatever makes us happy as long as we're not stopping anyone else from doing the same.

For what it's worth, there are atheist philanthropists, atheist charities, and atheist volunteers. It's not like Christians (or those of other faiths) can do anything moral with their religion that atheists cannot do just as well without.

If a Christian assumes I'm amoral, I'd make the safe assumption that they feel that way because I don't believe in the Christian god. But if the only thing stopping them from killing, raping, stealing, etc. is their belief in god, I'd be worried about them. I mean, what would Christians do if they stopped believing in god all of a sudden? Would they go around shooting everyone they met? I doubt it. There's more to morality than belief in a higher power.

### Atheists have no doubts

Have you ever questioned God? Have you ever wondered about the universe and how it works? Have you ever thought that maybe what you believe isn't the right thing to believe? If you have don't worry, you're not alone. It's a natural human tendency to question. Doubt isn't an emotion known only to Christians either.

"It's been a while since I've had doubts, but that's not to say I couldn't have them. When you fall in love or get a promotion or win a competition, it's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that someone is watching over you. But I've become more confident in my own ability to make those things happen."

I think, like most atheists, I'd be open to examining evidence for god. Unfortunately, the examples people give me are easily refutable or have an alternate explanation that they don't want to consider. Atheists hear the same arguments over and over. Too many Christians think they have some magical Bible verse that's going to change our minds. It's not."

We can benefit more from an open dialog than a heated argument, so next time you come across an atheist, instead of drawing the battle lines, try having a relaxed conversation. We'd never undermine the importance of spreading God's word, but sometimes it might be more beneficial to go into a conversation with a focus on learning rather than conversion. Ever wonder what Jesus was doing those 30 years before his ministry? It's possible he was taking the time to learn and understand the ways of those he wanted to minister to, and as with anything Jesus does, that's worth emulating.

believe