

S Cashman Engaging with Atheists

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[0 : 00] Well, to begin with, I'd really like to know why you're here tonight. Well, I'll take where we're going, actually, first. So what we're going to do, first of all, this is the introduction, why are we all here? So I want to hear from you why you're here, and I'll tell you how we're going to do that in a second.

Then I'll tell you why I'm here, and then we will look very briefly at two verses in the Bible, which also help us to see why we're here. Then we're going to do a little bit of discussing defector beliefs, so things in our society, in our culture, that lead people to think that belief in Christianity is like belief in the tooth fairy, something that we have grown up beyond, and you have to be a complete idiot to believe the gospel.

And then we'll have a little bit of time at the end, talking about getting into conversations, and getting real about the task ahead, and then some next steps for us all. So that's where we're going. But first of all, why are you here?

So for 30 seconds, I want everyone to think, don't say, don't speak, just think. Think of a specific friend who you would like to speak to about the Lord Jesus, someone you would perhaps be praying for, you'd like to share the gospel with.

And how do you hope this evening is going to help you? Think of a specific friend.

[1 : 49] In three's if you have to. Very briefly, discuss what do you think of the influences that have led this person to be an atheist, or at least to be disinterested in the gospel, if that's the case of your friend.

What are the influences that have affected them? I'll give you two minutes to do that. Go and get talking. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. The general thing is they're very young and going very brave to their universities and they don't see nothing else.

So I really find that it will make a difference to that. They're like, there's no fear right now, there's no fear right now. So actually there's a passivity whereby they go, oh well it might be correct, I want to leave in some form of it.

I want that one. I want to make a difference. Alright, good news. I'm trying to look at the project, I'm seeing a lot of impressions.

[3 : 03] I'm seeing a lot of impressions. I'm seeing a lot of impressions. I'm seeing a lot of impressions. I'm seeing a lot of impressions.

I'm seeing a lot of impressions. I'm seeing a lot of impressions. I'm seeing a lot of impressions. I'm seeing a lot of impressions. I'm seeing a lot of impressions. I'm seeing a lot of impressions. I'm seeing a lot of impressions.

I'm seeing a lot of impressions. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[5 : 00] What would help you engage this conversation with these people you've been talking about, with a friend you've been speaking about? What things might help you, do you think? Thank you.

Any thoughts? I guess very often we need confidence because we feel it's very personal to us we feel if we open up we're going to get shot down straight away and that'll be our one shot gun so confidence in ourselves but also in the message we're proclaiming confidence, ok thanks Ollie a question that will make them doubt their beliefs an opening point to get the conversation going in the first place question to those doubts an opening point sorry my writing's awful yeah that as well but I'm being nice because I'm not picking on someone else to do the writing for me so I've always

resolved never to pick on a teacher in this case and as a teacher it's the most accessible to me Sarah's already off limits so I think teachers spend all week writing on boards right ok so making point of the conversation a question to raise doubts in their minds confidence in the message we have any other things you think might help you sometimes events are really good that's an opening point almost say I'll come along to this and then that's the conversation as a result of that ok so events may be the opening point it sounds like you guys are all really sorted that actually have fantastic evangelistic conversations every day more knowledge about what they believe and what they believe and what they believe is great my writing's too bad it would really be the duty more knowledge read their beliefs ok one more the genuineness to the relationship may not be extensive or anything but genuine they sense that there's a genuineness to the next week ok thank you yeah that's that always helps doesn't it ok thank you for that my well let me tell you why I'm here hopefully that will help us as we go on my hope and prayer as I've been preparing for this over the last few weeks particularly this week is that we'll all be encouraged to start those conversations and hopefully something will come up which will be a question to help raise a doubt hopefully it will be a starting point in the conversation hopefully my prayer as it's night will be encouraged and have confidence as we go ahead to engage in these conversations so let me tell you very honestly how this has worked in my life in the last couple of weeks

I suddenly got to this point of oh dear I'm supposed to be doing this talk about engaging with atheists in conversations and because I work in a church and have done for 12 years one way or another I very rarely have those conversations unless someone brings their atheist to me so I was praying very specifically because I knew a neighbour about four doors up who I don't speak to very often because I don't see him very often and I know from conversations we've had in the past he almost certainly is an atheist so I was praying for an opportunity to actually meet Leo in the street or something and chat to him and lo and behold Friday a week ago as I crossed over the road there was Leo locked out of his house not happened before in the seven years we've lived on that street and so I got chatting and I said oh I started a new job he said oh how's it going blah blah blah I said well Leo I think that's something you might be able to help me with so I got to do this talk in a couple of weeks time about engaging with atheists and from things you've said in the past

I wonder if that's how you classed yourself well yeah kind of more that I just really guess to organise religion so I'd love to talk to you about that so okay well I'm going to get home until ten o'clock every night so what about next weekend which is actually last weekend not a hope so we haven't actually managed to have a conversation but at least we've got its flag that one day we need to go to a pub or a coffee shop or whatever and talk about this stuff a second illustration the guy who's the his son is in our daughter's class at school and they have a daughter who's the same age as our son and so they've been quite keen to build up a relationship with us and so they invited us all for brunch the other day I was working I started popping for an hour and I did I said so we ought to go for a coffee sometime so last Monday morning we did go for a coffee and again in my job it's great because people know where I'm coming from straight away and so as we were chatting I can't even remember quite how it happened but because we decided we wanted to actually get to know each other any genuine conversation the gospel's never very far away is it and

[10 : 31] I think he said something about how we had a bad back because that's the way we've evolved and I kind of smiled at him he said I guess you've got opinions about that and the conversation then went for there which is more about me asking him questions about what he thinks about life the universe and everything now after an hour over a cappuccino my final line to him is look he said he was an agnostic I said well what kind of agnostic are you and he said he wasn't prepared to say there is no God it would be interesting to find out more so what would convince you so I need to be convinced intellectually and intuitively which I think is a very honest answer and a good answer and so at the end I said well Simon go in and have a think about this happy if you say no but I'd be delighted to read some of some of the Bible's accounts of Jesus' life with you just work through it very casually and see what you think see if that produces the evidence now he hasn't come back to me that was last Monday

I pray he will and we'll see how it goes what really helped me was having this thing to do made me go and do something I'm such a coward naturally such a non-gifted evangelist in my own opinion I want to tell you those stories A so you know that I'm actually a bit of a muppet and need need something like this to get me going B to know that when we're praying things do happen I know we need to believe that as Christians but sometimes it takes us for a surprise doesn't it so my hope and

prayer is that we'll all be encouraged tonight to start those kind of conversations and hopefully something helpful will come out tonight now the biblical rationale you told me why you're here I told you why I'm here the biblical rationale for being here these very famous verses 1 Peter chapter 3 verses 14 and 15 so the context is opposition and hostility to the gospel and what does Peter say even if you should suffer for righteousness sake you will be blessed have no fear of them nor be troubled but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy always being prepared how do we honour Christ the Lord as holy what does that look like part of it means always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that is in you yet do it with gentleness and respect now as many of you know probably all of you know that word defence in the Greek is apologia it's the word from which we get apologetics now the trouble is apologetics sounds like a specialist subject it sounds like a branch of philosophy it sounds like something for the very clever or the very committed or the people who are into that kind of thing but notice it's not just make a defence it's not an area of philosophy it's not for special people it's just part of our discipleship it's part of setting Christ Jesus apart as Lord as holy in our hearts this is Peter's instruction to all Christians be ready be ready in your conversations to make a defence and so we're not going to be looking at great philosophy tonight because that wouldn't help anyone I don't know about you I've sat in many lectures in my life and I think that's great and 20 minutes later I can't remember any of it because it was really over my head now I'm not going to do that partly because I don't think it would help you and perhaps more importantly because I can't do it I'm not that smart but I want us all to be able to make a defence to anyone who asks us and to do so with gentleness and respect God willing so to begin with to get the ball rolling I want you to turn around again to the person next to you and I'm going to give you one minute each to tell someone why you believe the gospel is true why you believe the gospel is true because we can't do that here in this room with other believers we'll never do it anywhere else so one minute why do you believe why do you believe go thank you

Thank you.

[15 : 34] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

That was definitely a big issue if you like tonight. What would be the question that would help people examine their own... It would cause doubt, so that's why you phrased it, wasn't it? So let me turn it around.

How often have you asked somebody else why they believe what they believe? Or why they're an atheist, or why they're an agnostic? Do you ever ask that question?

[17 : 30] Why do you believe what you believe? Why don't you go to church? Why do you think I'm mad believing this stuff?

I probably wouldn't want to ask it exactly that tone of voice, but... The point is we need to start conversations, don't we? As I've already confessed, the deadline of this coming up forced me to do it.

Forced me to get over my fear. Christmas is coming up. Great opportunity. What do you think about Christmas? Why do you do the things you do?

Do you ever go to church at Christmas? Why? Why not? All sorts of things one could ask. Do you want to come to a carol service here? Why do you want to come?

Why don't you? Just be interested. Now, as Paul said, if there's genuineness in our relationships, genuineness in our care and our love for these people, then they will ask.

[18 : 34] Now, what I want to do now, that's kind of to set a background, I suppose. What I want to do now is perhaps get more into the title of the evening. How do we actually do that with people who are atheists, who are complete unbelievers?

Now, there are all sorts of, what have been labelled defeater beliefs, out there in our culture. There are things which people just absorb from the media, from the films they watch, from the papers they read, from the talking heads who are rolled out as experts on various topics, which just mean believing that there is a God out there who is three persons in one, who sent his eternal Son to come in human flesh, to die on a cross for sinners like us, and he rose again, and he's coming one day to judge us all.

It just makes all that seem like a fairy tale. That you may as well believe in the tooth fairy. So what I want to do is run through what I think some of those beliefs are, and then ask you what I think, what

you think some of those beliefs are, for the ones I've missed out, and then we're going to focus in on one tonight, as a bit of, because I think it's one of the most obvious when we come to atheists in particular.

And if we get more time, we can talk about some of the others too, but let's just see how we get on. So the one we're going to deal with tonight is that science makes belief in God just implausible and ridiculous. All sorts of reasons people believe that which we'll come to.

A second one is that it's perfectly possible to live a happy, decent life without God. I just, I don't get up in the morning and feel like I desperately need forgiveness. I don't wake up in the morning feeling I'm not in control of my life.

[20 : 12] Yeah, life's fine. So why would I, if you want to believe that's great, it doesn't touch me. And the old chestnut of religion causes so many problems in the world that belief in God is a dangerous thing.

It's kind of Christopher Hitchens line, God is not great how religion poisons everything. And let's face it, as you look at the Islamic State and what they're doing, there's a point to that.

Suffering in the world shows that it cannot be a good God. Now it could be a kind of, there's an earthquake, loads of people have died, how can God allow that? It could be, my niece has leukemia.

How can good God allow that? The Bible's unreliable. It's made up by power-hungry men. We've all seen the Da Vinci Code, we know that's true. Christianity is repressive of women, lesbians and gays.

How can anyone believe that kind of nonsense? How could you worship a God who is like that if he exists? He's fundamentally intolerant. And of course underlying a lot of these things is the idea that there is no absolute truth.

[21 : 21] How could you claim that Jesus is the only way to God? We've got it up there, haven't we? Where is it? Verse 6. The blue sheet. How could you, how dare you, indoctrinate little primary school children and that kind of stuff?

You evil people. So that's some of the defeat of those. Any other thoughts that come to your mind about perhaps what people you've met? Think right. Andrew, you can say something now.

Well, one within our family that's mentioned is, it kind of relates to thought, is, you know, Jesus was, was good to women, kind of like a blend of five and six, but Paul corrupted it all.

Oh, right. And the other one had an interesting conversation with Christo's dad, with Christo, and he was telling me about life under communism and stuff, and then it basically came out since like four, basically a family that God would allow the communists to get away with what they got away with.

Right. Yeah. So first-hand experience of suffering leading to that and the whole sort of the weird things happening in the Bible. the Christianity we have today is not genuine because Paul corrupted it.

[22 : 34] Or was that sort of... And that's from someone totally different. Someone different. But, yeah. Okay. It was a particular application of suffering. Yeah. Thank you. That's helpful. Any others? Before we...

Samia and then whoever else was... Yeah. And you might just get in with one of my friends. I think that she wants to be God. The question is, you know, if you have a Christian who is worse than another non-Christian is just because he's Christian because of heaven and she wants to do the rules and...

Okay. Yeah. I better repeat it for the recording in case anyone listens to it. So the issue is somebody who really wants to be God herself. You can say as well, how can a Christian get to heaven when they're not nearly as nice and that's perfectly moral person over here who's better. Thank you. Sorry, somebody else is about to say something to see who it was. Yeah, I was just going to say that because there are so many different religions happen, anyone thinks which one is the right one? Yeah. How can anyone pinpoint one right religion when there are so many?

Okay, so lots of things out there. What we're going to do, as I say, is look briefly at the first one, the science makes belief in God implausible.

[23 : 45] Partly because that's the big sort of atheist agenda. Some of us might have seen some of Brian Cox's recent series, The Human Universe. He's a great apologist for atheism.

I mean, Richard Dawkins just winds everyone up because he's so belligerent and his arguments are actually not very good. Brian Cox is a brilliant storyteller.

So he spent the last five weeks on BBC2 telling the story of the human universe where there is no God. He doesn't beat up on religion, but he very subtly, very subtly actually preaches this. Belief in God is implausible. I'm Brian Cox from a primetime television. I can explain everything to you. Why do you need a God? So that's why we're going to look at this. It fits with my background nicely and also fits with what I heard from the Evangelist Conference a few weeks ago where John Lennox was speaking.

I'll reveal all my sources at the end, but a lot of it comes from that day and from John Lennox and from what he's written. John Lennox is a guy with a brain and the size of a planet.

[24 : 55] He is a professor at Oxford University. He's engaged with many atheists and debates and I'll recommend this particular book at the end, Gunning for God. Much more in there. Anyway, what goes on when people say science has disproved Christianity or I don't need a God because I've got facts of science, you've got faith.

What's going on? I think there are three confusions going on. Okay? One is a confusion about the nature of science. What actually is science? What is science?

Second is a confusion about faith and this is key. We'll come to it in a moment. But there is this idea out there propagated by atheists like Richard Dawkins that faith is believing in the face of evidence even in the teeth of evidence or in the absence of evidence.

That it's just wishful thinking. And thirdly, there's confusion about the nature of God. That when people talk about God, they're not talking about the triune God of the Bible, they're talking about the God they don't believe in, as opposed to the God that is actually there who they don't believe in.

You see what I mean? I work through these things relatively quickly. So first of all, confusion about science. Probably none of you have heard of this guy, Peter Atkins, but he's quite a storm-chaseist, actually to the disappointment of some in his department in Oxford.

[26 : 18] Physical chemists, any chemistry student in this country will have read his books, will have used his books. A great textbook writer. And he has said, science is omnipotent.

I'm told that about ten years ago, he said, in five years time, we'll have got rid of this intellectual extrement called religion. So there, that's where he's coming from. And of course, a lot of people think that, even if they don't know anything about science, that science explains everything.

I mean, look, I've got an iPad. Science is amazing. So, what do we need to say about that? Well, the kind of belief behind it is that science is all about facts, it's what we know.

Religion is about faith. Believing stuff that we know isn't true, really. Science can, or at least will one day, explain anything. So we just don't need a god anymore.

How do we respond to that? Well, let me say a couple of things about that. First of all, we need to affirm science. Science is good.

[27 : 20] Science is powerful. We're all grateful for cars that work when they do, for computers that sometimes don't crash, all that kind of stuff. Science is good. We're all thankful for the health care we get.

But the laws of science describe the universe, they don't produce the universe. the laws describe the universe, they don't produce the universe. Now that may sound like no surprise to you, but it is a big surprise to some very clever people.

So Stephen Hawking, who I'm sure you know, a great physicist from Cambridge, cosmologist, has said, because there is such a law as gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing.

Because there is such a thing as gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing. Brian Cox in the Human Universe program just a few weeks ago claimed that because we have two fundamental laws, you've got the standard model of particle physics and Einstein's general relativity, because you've got those two laws, that just explains everything.

You don't need anything else, you just need those laws. He even wrote them down on a piece of paper and showed them to the camera. This is all you need to understand life is effectively what he was saying. But let's think about that.

[28 : 39] Do laws really create anything? Let me give you a mathematical law. 1,000 plus 1,000 equals 2,000.

Okay. Has that ever made you richer? Has the fact that 1,000 plus 1,000 equals 2,000? Does that create anything in your bank account? Has that added any money to you?

No. Years ago, I think it was C.S. Lewis used this illustration. If I put 1,000 pounds in my drawer, and a week later put another 1,000 pounds in the drawer, if I go back and discover there's 2,000

pounds there, I know where it came from.

If there's 3,000 pounds there, then I know someone's interfered. If there's less than 2,000 pounds there, I know someone's interfered. Laws do not create anything. I'm sure as most of us know, the reason modern science flourished in the Western world is because of a Christian worldview. Because Christians believed, and because the culture was shaped by Christianity at that point, that there is one God who made everything, they believed there would be order and rationality in the universe to go and look for.

[29 : 52] So many of the great early scientists, like Isaac Newton, were Christians. They assumed there would be laws that would describe the world around, because they believed in one God who made it all.

So laws don't create anything. Science is good, laws describe the universe, they don't produce the universe. It's a great thing that Brian Cox can write down two laws on a piece of paper and say it explains lots of things.

And they do explain a lot of things. Science is powerful because there is a God who ordered this universe and made it all. So that's the first thing I want to say on that, on the confusion about science.

Science is good, but laws describe they don't produce. And if you want to, it's always good to quote a German philosopher, isn't it? I mean, to say I turn up at church on Saturday night and some bloke who did a chemistry degree sometime back in the last century said this doesn't mean anything. You say Wittgenstein said the great delusion of modernity is that the laws of nature explain the universe for us. The laws of nature describe the universe. They describe the regularities, but they explain nothing.

[31 : 00] There you go, even a German philosopher agrees with this. The second thing about that is that there are many areas of human knowledge that we believe to be true for good reason, that cannot be proven scientifically.

There are many areas of human knowledge that we believe to be true, not just us in this room, but human beings generally, that cannot be proved scientifically. Now, I got this courtesy, and there's in the handout I can send you, and there's the link to YouTube.

I got this from a debate between William Lane Craig, great Christian apologist, and Peter Atkins, who saw earlier. And Atkins uttered those inortal words, science is omnipotent. And he turned to William Lane Craig and said, you really don't think science is omnipotent?

No, I don't. Here's five reasons why. So actually, in the area of mathematics and logic, science cannot prove one plus one equals one.

Science cannot prove logical things like black is not white. It can't prove those things. And yet every human being will agree on them.

[32 : 06] These logical laws, mathematical laws, cannot actually be proven scientifically. So you're a mathematician. Have I oversimplified things there? I mean, obviously there are lots of mathematical things we prove, but Sarah's agreed.

That's good. metaphysical things. By which I mean, I believe that I have a brain and mind, and I believe you do as well.

I believe that as I stand here speaking, there are other people in the room who can think and comprehend. Can I prove that scientifically? I suppose I could prove that there are other bodies in the room.

I guess we could put us all in MRI scanners and prove we've got brains. But can I prove you have a mind, that you're a thinking person? No. And yet, on the whole, most people I meet in life do interact with me at least on the assumption that I am another individual person who can think.

And yet science can't prove that. Or thirdly, you get ethical beliefs. I can pretty much guarantee that if you go out on the streets or ask any of your friends, is it pedophilia wrong?

[33 : 22] Is the sexual abuse of children wrong? Almost everyone will say, yes it is. And even those who, for whatever twisted reason, don't think it's wrong, in the current climate would not own up to that.

Does anyone think it's right to murder? Not really. Can science prove that murder is wrong? Can science prove that pedophilia is wrong?

No, of course not. You cannot do that experiment. You cannot empirically prove it. So the scientific method is great, it's very powerful, but there are these whole areas of human knowledge which it

cannot touch.

Well, fourthly, the whole, sort of falling off on that, aesthetic beliefs and values. Just as science cannot prove moral beliefs and absolutes, you cannot scientifically prove that the Mona Lisa is more beautiful than a little stick man I draw there.

If I do draw a stick man, trust me, I'm no artist. You see my handwriting. But science cannot prove that. Science cannot prove that all the cinematography and beauty of *Interstellar*, not that I've seen it yet, the latest Christopher Nolan film, is far better than the little video clip I took on my iPad of my daughter playing.

[34 : 47] Science can't prove those things. And yet no one would question them. And most amusingly of all, science itself cannot be justified by the scientific method.

Science itself cannot be justified by the scientific method. So the scientific method basically, you need to take empirical observations, you need to observe things, and then build your theories up from that.

Why do that? Why do that? Why assume that there will be, if you do enough observations, you will be able to build up laws and theories which have predictive value? Science can't prove that that works, it just assumes that it works.

It just assumes that it works. And again, it's always good to have someone much more clever on your side. So John Hawkinghorne, who was a professor of mathematical physics at the University of Cambridge, put it like this, physics is powerless to explain its faith in the rational intelligibility of the universe.

Simply because you cannot do any physics unless you believe it in the first place. So why do people spend millions, billions of pounds on a Hadron Collider buried in the Alps?

[36 : 08] because they believe that their theories will be right. Why do they believe their theories will be right? Because they have faith that there is order at the heart of the universe. Why did Johannes Kepler three or four centuries ago sit down with ten years of data about the stars to analyze it and try and figure out what was going on and eventually derive Kepler's laws?

Answer? Because he was a Christian believer and he had faith that it would be something intelligible in the universe. Why does every PhD student and postdoc in this country go to their labs on a Monday morning or stay out late at night doing their work?

Because they have faith that what they're doing is actually going to come to something, come to fruition, that they'll make sense of whatever the problem is, that they'll learn something.

Science requires faith. Science itself cannot be justified by the scientific method. So is science omnipotent? No, it's not. It cannot even prove itself.

It just has to trust, it has to have faith. So, we talked at the start about needing to ask questions for people. So, let me ask you a question at this point, rather than me just talking on.

[37 : 23] Assuming you have a friend who thinks that science explains everything, I don't need anything else. What kind of questions could you ask to help them think about their own presupposition, think about their brain belief.

I'd like you to spend a couple of minutes talking to the person next to you and then I'll ask for ideas. Making you work. Get the brain cells working. desde desde desde desde desde desde desde desde Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Okay. Would you like to draw those conversations to a close and share some of your great thoughts?

[40 : 01] I'd love to hear them. Okay. Right. Who's got a great question they want to throw out there?

John. Can science explain what's right and what's wrong? Yes. Because we all inherently believe it. Sorry. Go for it. We both came up with the same one.

Oh, wonderful. Great. Nice to come up. Yeah, but you said you were thinking of it. How do you explain love? How do you explain love? Very simple. Very true.

And that's great because it's something everyone experiences. Then you'd have a PhD in philosophy to understand that. One more. We'll begin to hear. Yeah. Science is always developing. There are things that we know now about great ramparts. We can explain love. The facilities were there. The electric or television was there.

[40 : 57] But science in those days knew nothing about it. Yeah. So science is always progressing. But God spilled into the world. Thank you.

So I didn't catch. God spilled into the world. All these things. And we only have a fraction of them at the moment. Yeah. Thank you. That's helpful. To put it back the other way though, an atheist friend might then say, well, yeah, science is expanding all the time.

So back in the past, people were stupid enough to still believe in God. Intellectual pygmies. Why do you still believe in God? Science will one day explain everything. That's the Dawkins view.

That's the Peter Atkins view. In five years' time, we'll have got rid of this intellectual expert called religion. So I think we have to be slightly careful about the, our assumption, which I think is a good assumption, that yes, we can do science, and science will keep increasing, because God has made the world that way.

But if we use that in a discussion, then it can easily play back against us, I suppose my concern. Let me just throw out a few things that I thought of, I'm sure you thought of many, many more. I'm going to ask, why do you think science explains everything?

[42 : 09] As a quick way into the, what about love? What about truth? Etc. Or ask the question, are there things that science can't measure? Or determine? Right and wrong, maybe?

Well, how does science help you decide what's right and wrong? Or beautiful and true? And what is more important to you?

Scientific discoveries about subatomic particles? Does anyone really understand what a Higgs-Boson is? Or having a framework for knowing whether it's right or wrong to cheat on your girlfriend?

Embezzle money from your employer? Whatever it is. There's a few thoughts. Let's move on to the second area of confusion, which is the confusion about what faith is.

There's confusion about science out there. There's also confusion about faith. So, for example, this is the new atheist definition. Faith is an evil precisely because it requires no justification and brooks no argument.

[43 : 18] Sorry, I shouldn't try and do his accent. That is naughty, obviously. Faith is believing in the absence of evidence, even in the teeth of evidence. It's amazing that you can be a professor at a supposedly great university and think things like that.

Anyway. Incidentally, I can't help but throw this out. One of the things I always love about Richard Dawkins is how he claims that Christianity, religion generally, is against intellectual growth, intellectual development.

It's against science. And yet, the place where he's built his career, you know what the motto is? The Lord is my light.

Isn't that fantastic? Anyway. There we go. That's the same point. A little aside there. But that's the definition of faith. And actually, as John Lillian was saying a few weeks ago, that definition has now crept into some modern dictionaries.

So since 2000, the definition of faith in the dictionary has started to change. So it's actually believing nonsense in the absence of any proof. So, what do we need to do about that?

[44 : 27] But one thing we can say is that of course, science requires faith. Actually, almost everything we do in life requires some kind of faith. But beyond that, we need to say that biblical faith is trust in a person built on evidence.

And that's really key. So we start to talk about having faith in God, having faith in the Bible, having faith in Jesus. That it sounds like having faith in the tooth fairy to our atheist friends.

So we need to help them to understand that in the Bible, when the Bible talks about faith, it's not talking about throwing your mind out. It's talking about trust in a person.

And every human being knows what it is to trust in a person. And who do we trust? We don't generally trust the first plumber we find in yellow pages, because we don't have any evidence whether they can do the job.

We might trust them if we've checked them out on checker trade. We might trust them if our neighbour gives a good write-up. What are we doing? We're trusting them on the basis of some evidence.

[45 : 34] And that's what faith is in the Bible. As those of you who are IPC know, at the moment, we're working through John's Gospel in our house groups.

And I'm sure we all know this. I'm sure we've had it every week. We've been in the Bible studies. So how does John conclude chapter 20 of his Gospel? Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples which were not written in this book, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, that by believing you may have life in his name. It's trust in a person built on evidence. That's why Peter can say that verse we looked at earlier. Always be ready to give a reason for the hope that you have. It's all reasonable. We must be careful when we use the word faith.

People will hear something different to what we mean. Faith in the Bible is not faith in the tooth fairy. It's trust in a person built on evidence. Built on evidence.

Another thing to be careful of is faith is not a force like in Star Wars. And that's how some people use faith, isn't it? If you take an umbrella with you on a day when it doesn't rain, you may hear someone say something like, oh, you should have had more faith.

[46 : 52] What? What does that mean? Faith is not a force like in Star Wars. I mean, superstitions. We'll all be alright, touch wood. That's not what faith is.

It might be how some people use the word faith. It's not how the Bible uses the word faith. It's not what Christians mean by faith. And, very importantly, never talk about science versus faith.

Why not? Because as soon as we do, we're falling into this false dichotomy set up by the new atheists. They want us to believe that there's science, which is all fact.

And then faith, which is just your opinion and your personal idea. And as soon as we start using that language, we've already conceded a whole lot of ground. We've fallen into a trap, a false dichotomy.

It's just not right. Okay? So, we need to avoid that kind of talk. Any questions before I ask you a question? How would you respond to somebody who says, oh, I wish I could have your faith?

[48 : 00] Oh. How do you respond to someone who says, I wish I could have your faith? I think the question would be, why do you think you can't have my faith? What would persuade you to have my faith?

There's a danger that as good Calvinists we kind of, at that point, retreat and go, oh, maybe they're not the elect. Or maybe they might not be. But that's, when they say, I wish I had a faith like yours, they're not worrying about predestination.

They've got something else that's keeping them back. So, I think I'm just asking, why do you think you can't have a faith like that? Paul? I think it comes back to these definitions too.

What is it they're looking for? What is it they think we have some kind of a force? Yeah, that's a good point. Parking spaces. Yeah. Make it rain on the red cave and things like that. Yeah, yeah.

It's something you're born with that you just have with that sort of person. That's right. Yeah, you have the faith gene. Yeah. But I think that's really helpful, Paul.

[49 : 00] So, what do you mean by faith? What is it that I have that you don't have? Yeah. Sorry. I'm just confusing facts about the last time you were saying that I never talked about science versus faith.

Right. Because, you know, to me, in fact, I would say that I would need to be clear that God reigns supreme and is in control of everything.

So, as such, I can basically stand firm and say that I've got some things that can prove that in fact that our faith is right to me. Yeah.

It's science. So, if we don't get involved, don't get in that discussion, you know what I mean? Where I've come from? Yeah. You need to know that, you know, well, you know, we firmly agree because, to me, if you sort of shut away from it, they'll say, you know, to my mind, they'll say, you know, oh, so you haven't got a lot of trust in your God that you talk about is supreme.

Yeah, no, thanks for asking that, Terry, because I may have confused issues. Yes, we do have faith. The point is, so does the scientists. And it's not that our faith is irrational because the way people now are using the word faith is not the way that we're using it when I was at university or even ten years ago.

[50 : 15] Now they use faith to mean just sort of blind, ignorant beliefs. Some might say, do you have, to me, do you have faith in Scotland to beat the All Blacks today?

No, I have no faith at all because the thing that Scotland could beat the All Blacks at rugby is just a mad idea for the check results at the end. But, our faith, our trust is built on evidence.

Like you say, you've got hundreds of reasons to go back to many personal experience as well as sort of evidence for the Bible etc, etc that lead you to believe there is a God who reigns over everything.

So you do have faith but if you say you have faith they hear something different. So I trust the God of the Bible and I have lots of reasons for trusting him.

But I wouldn't want to get into a you know, I just have faith because it, to modern ears that sounds like you haven't thought and you don't know.

[51 : 16] That's what I mean. Can we talk about that more at the end because I think I've probably confused you even further. I'm like that I'm afraid. That's a good issue. So, what would you ask? What would you ask to open up the conversation?

For someone who thinks that faith is believing something to be true in the absence of evidence even in the truth of evidence what would you ask? Two minutes, chat to the person next to you again. Thank you.

I think maybe you can even go and tell them and tell them and tell them And they go, of course. And they go, what? And so it's redefining in their mind what kind of mean by those things.

Thank you.

[53 : 25] Nikki, what did you have? You were in an animated conversation that group. Well, how do you know that there's absence of evidence? Okay. Yep.

That's a really good one. Yeah. How do you know there's no evidence? What would be an expectancy? That's good. Any more? Any others? Do you know why I believe in God? Yeah. Yep. Very good. Do you know why? Let's throw a few more out there. So what do you think faith is? Let's get them to actually think about that for themselves.

Why do you believe you can trust me? Or your boyfriend or your girlfriend or your spouse or whatever. Because then that gets to the heart of what biblical faith is. It's trust in a person. It's not belief in some abstract force out there.

It's trust in a person. What evidence would you need to believe that God exists? Which is, I guess, kind of along the same lines as Nicky's questions. I'm sure there are many others we could ask.

Let's get on third to the confusion about God.

[54 : 31] And there are a couple of falsely assumptions that atheists often make. Firstly, there's this idea that actually Christians believe in a God who was created. Which might sound really bizarre.

And it is really bizarre. But Richard Dawkins, in his great God delusion book, chapter 4, which is entitled Why There Almost Certainly Is No God. And his knockdown argument is that God is even more improbable than a 747.

God is the ultimate bow in 747. He's an easy illustration of if you get a scrapyard and a wind blow through it, what are the chances of a 747 being created? Zero. So how could you ever have a God then?

His assumption is that actually God must be made up of material stuff. Which is just a bizarre assumption. Anyway. So that's not the God that we believe. I'm glad Richard Dawkins doesn't believe in a God who evolved.

Neither do I. But that's one assumption that atheists sometimes make. A second assumption is that Christians believe in a God of the gaps. That God to explain what science cannot explain.

[55 : 43] So for example, just a couple of weeks ago on television, Brian Cox and the Human Universe, as an illustration of his bigger argument, he shows this island in the Pacific that erupted about 10 years ago, I think.

So it's a very new island. And this is his line. If we didn't know better, we might ascribe that creation to an act of the gods. But we do know better. Why? Because we've done some science.

Geology and plate tectonics. Absolutely. Yes, Brian. I totally agree. That we can explain how that island came to believe, came to exist, through plate tectonics and through geology.

And stuff is great. That doesn't mean there wasn't a God. And I'll say why in a moment. So how do we respond to that confusion? Well, firstly, being able to describe a mechanism does not mean there's no agent.

Being able to describe a mechanism does not mean there's no agent. So I'm going to use a trivial example to try and help make that point. I'm wearing clean clothes.

[56 : 51] How do they get clean? Answer. We have a washing machine. There's a very clever mechanism in that washing machine. You put some detergent in.

It does its stuff. Clothes get clean. I have a mechanism. It cleans my clothes. Does that explain everything? Well, did I need an agent as well?

Did I need an agent to design the washing machine in the first place? Some little engineer working for Indusit somewhere? Did I need an agent, in this case my wife, to put the clothes in the washing machine and get them out again?

Yeah. So you have a mechanism. It doesn't mean there wasn't an agent who operated that mechanism or who designed the mechanism or who set it up in the first place. So, with Brian Cox and his islands that have erupted, yes, you understand the mechanism.

That's fantastic. That doesn't mean there wasn't an agent there to operate the mechanism, to design that mechanism in the first place. Now, going back to the conversation I mentioned earlier on, I was chatting to my friend Simon over coffee last Monday morning and he asked me about evolution.

[58 : 02] I said, well, it's clear to me that you do get a certain amount of natural selection. So, in certain, bacteria become resistant to antibiotics, etc., etc. So, natural selection is certainly a mechanism.

However, having a mechanism, Simon, doesn't mean there isn't an agent behind that. And I said in my Washington scene illustration, and he said, yeah, that's true. As an environmental lawyer, he said, yeah, that makes sense.

And that's great, because who of us wants to have an argument about evolution? It's absolutely ingrained in all people are taught. And actually, we don't want people to not believe in evolution. We want people to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. So, we don't want to pick fights we don't need to pick, if you see what I mean. Except Richard Dawkins seems to have a problem with it. Well, Richard Dawkins does. He's going to go and blowing through a chunk of the universe of the Lord. Yeah. I could tell you something Brian Cox said about an arrow being designed and how complicated that was.

[59 : 03] It couldn't just happen. This is his first episode of the human universe. But, you know, it's interesting, Brian. An arrow couldn't just happen. It needed creative intelligence. Look around you, Brian. Look around you.

Anyway. There we go. So, being an agent, having a mechanism doesn't necessarily mean you don't have an agent. Secondly, there's a different levels of exploration do not compete with one another. You have different levels of exploration. So, let me use this trivial example. How did this cake get here? I don't mean the cake on the screen. I mean, imagine for a moment there was a big humongous ice cake with a candle in it.

What is it? What is it? How did it get here? Somebody made it. Somebody made it but you could also argue well, it's just a whole bunch of carbohydrates and fats and proteins combined. That's what it is.

And on one level, yes, that's what a cake is. It's a whole bunch of fats and carbohydrates and proteins. On the other hand, you could also say it's Aunt Gladys made it for her niece's birthday.

[60 : 00] There are two separate types of explanation, two different levels of explanation. It's like Brian Cox and his islands again. Yes, on one level, it is something that erupted from all the lava beneath the surface on the edge of those tectonic plates.

Yes, that's one level of explanation. But how we got those plates in the first place, how this universe came into existence, there's a whole other level of explanation there.

Or to use John Lennox's words, God is no more in competition with science as an explanation of the universe than Henry Ford competes with science as an explanation for the internal combustion engine.

I think that's rather good. That's why he gets invited to this because he's a clever guy. So there you go. Next time someone thinks that science explains everything, different levels of explanation do not compete with each other regardless of what Richard Dawkins may think of Brian Cox or anyone else.

Any questions or comments so far? We've got about five minutes left. There are a couple of things I would like to do. Any questions or comments? I just forget to the important of us to remember that it's God's science.

[61 : 21] It's God's science, yes. Absolutely. Thank you Chris for mentioning that. It is God's science. There is no competition. I have a brilliant quote somewhere in another presentation from a guy who won the Nobel Prize for chemistry.

His name was actually Melvin Calvin. And he said, having looked through all of history to see where this idea came from that there could be an intelligible universe around us.

So I first found it articulated millennia ago by the ancient Hebrews that actually there is one God and he made everything. And that is absolutely right. It's God's science. Christians have a reason for believing in science.

So getting into conversation. So think about the friends you thought about earlier. We're not... We don't have time to do this properly now. Think about it. What do you think are the influences that led that person to their current belief or unbelief as they might see it?

What defeater beliefs might be preventing them even considering the gospel as a serious option? And what questions could you ask them to find out more about why they believe what they believe?

[62 : 40] We've talked about some of those questions tonight. And then perhaps most importantly in what context could you actually have that conversation with them?

In what context could you just begin that conversation? That's probably not going to happen in the office while you're working. It's probably not going to happen if you happen to bump into them on the street.

It will take a ranging opportunity won't it? I need to get back to Leo who lives three doors down and go let's go to the pub and talk about this.

I need to meet up with Simon again. May take Zoe to school on Monday morning so I bump into him to drink a coffee again sometime. What is the context the time the place that you can have that kind of conversation?

Now with all that in mind let's just think for a moment about getting real with the task. There are a whole lot of people out there who don't believe there is a God some of them quite ardently.

[63 : 45] What makes it impossible for us to share the gospel with others? What makes it impossible? Because the answer is that it's a spiritual problem.

It's not an intellectual problem. It's a spiritual problem isn't it? That's why people don't believe. So with our unbelieving friends it's not that they don't know the truth but Romans 1 they suppress the truth.

Everybody knows there is a God out there. His invisible qualities of the eternal power have been seen since the creation from the things that have been made.

Everybody naturally knows it and yet every human being naturally suppresses it. And it's not that our unbelieving friends want the truth.

Actually they don't naturally want the truth at all. What's John's verdict in John chapter 3? Having said that God so loved the world he sent his only son he says this verse 19 and this is the judgment that light has come into the world and people love the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.

[64 : 55] But actually the problem is never intellectual but ultimately it's spiritual one. People prefer the darkness.

And it's not that they can see the truth about Jesus because they can't. Paul's been preaching through 2 Corinthians as you know chapter 4 the God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus.

I want to remind us of all that so that we don't think that actually it's just a matter of asking the right questions next week. It's not simply that. What does it need? If people are going to come to faith in Christ is it our clever answers?

What does it need? The Holy Spirit. And can I remind us a fact we all know but I think we often forget is apart from God's grace that's where we would be.

Now I was brought up in a Christian home there's really never there has never been a day I have doubted the Christian faith. Never. Obviously one has doubts one goes on but essentially I've grown up with this.

[66 : 05] And isn't it easy for those of us who've grown up in a Christian faith to actually to forget in our hearts the truth we know in our heads that we are naturally in Adam not in Christ we are naturally dead in our sins we naturally would not see the truth about Jesus we naturally wouldn't care we would naturally prefer the darkness because our deeds are naturally evil we must remind

ourselves of that fundamental truth all the time because apart from God's grace this is how we would all be too it's not because we're clever so now some questions for us as we consider that fact as we go on is our life together as a church different enough that people will ask us questions remember that's the context of that verse we looked at in 1 Peter 3 let me go back to it for a moment so we've got it there 1 Peter 3 15 but even if you that's you plural

I come from the Scottish borders even if you you that's how we do the plural there should suffer for righteousness sake you will be blessed for those of you from the US and southern states if where is it let me read it again but even if you all should suffer for righteousness sake you all will be blessed have no fear of them nor be troubled but in your all hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy it's the plural it's about the community as the church looks on it as the world looks on it sees the church suffering and yet having a hope in that they will ask questions it's the same in Colossians 4 verse 2 to 6 Paul's talking about evangelism how he talked about the difference it makes in the church that Christ is risen we're united in Christ seated with him in the heavenly realms he then says be wise in the way you all act towards outsiders make the most of every opportunity let your conversation be full of grace and seasoned with salt so that you may know so y'all may know how to answer each one as you should it's the life of the church the life of believers together that will provide the questions so a question for us is our church life whether it's here at IPC or at

Amien Park is it sufficiently different from the world around us that it will cause people to ask questions and secondly is our love for the Lord so great that we will speak of him naturally it's one of my constant prayers to myself I think of friends who talk about stuff all the time I had a colleague years ago who every week without fail would tell me about Wilverhampton Wanderers and how they got on and it actually got to the stage where I started to be interested in Wilverhampton Wanderers I don't care about Wilverhampton Wanderers really but because Graham was passionate about I started to take an interest as well but he spoke because he loved them is that how I talk about Jesus for me does it just sound like a job I'm very conscious when I'm talking to people about my work does it just sound like a job or does it sound like this is my passion because the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me and to pray for more love and is our love for others so great that we want to offer

Christ to them Paul says to the Thessalonians we loved you so much that we shared with you not only the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ but our very lives ourselves as well in a world where people naturally have so much against believing in God are we prepared to share our lives am I prepared to share my life with Simon at the school gate with Leo three doors down is our conviction of the truth so great that we feel the urgency to speak there are questions to reflect on there over to you for a moment in silence last few minutes I promise I want you to think is there one thing from tonight that you want to take away I know there's so much we haven't talked about so much we haven't done but is there one thing you would like to take away give you 30 seconds to think about it my usual trick tell the person next to you the reason

I'm doing this by the way is if you verbalize it you will remember it you're likely to remember it so there you go thanks those It seems deliberate in creating a tiny place.

[71 : 16] So Z is the recipe. I work in a few questions. They actually put them in a little bit. They put them saying how you feel about this.

How about nothing? How do you feel something? How do you feel this? That's the step. Which I would have time to take.

Whereas everywhere else, I would ask the key system. Yeah. Yeah.

I'm not a person. I'm not a person. I'm not a person. I'm not a person. I'm not a person. I'm not a person. I'm not a person. I'm not a person. I'm not a person. I'm not a person.

I'm not a person. I'm not a person. I'm not a person. I'm not a person. I'm not a person. I'm not a person. I'm not a person. I'm not a person. I'm not a person. Thank you.

[72 : 43] Thank you.

Because otherwise, I don't know what I'm like. I just walk out and say, yeah, that was good, and then forget. But if we love the Lord Jesus, if our friends are really heading for hell, then let's encourage one another.

Christian life is a team sport, isn't it? It's not a solo sport. We're in it together. Okay. Before I pray for us, if you want the full handout, either both, whatever you like, if you want all these PowerPoint slides, I can send you those.

If you want, I have a kind of fuller, more detailed, eight-page document, which has footnotes as well, which I'd be delighted to send you. And also has some random thoughts at the end about the emotional appeal of atheism.

Half-form thoughts, but you're welcome to have them. Right. There's my email address. Let me read to you some verses from Colossians, then I'll pray, and then everyone's free to go home. Sorry we were on a little bit.

[74 : 17] So it's Colossians chapter 4, that I mentioned. I'll read verse 2, then read verse 5 and 6. Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

And verse 5. Conduct yourselves wisely towards outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Let me pray for this.