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In the Name of the Holy Trinity
"Pastoral Theology" Course

Day 1 - lecture 1
The Servant and Confronting Atheism
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Servant and prevention against Atheism: Or how the servant immunizes his sons and daughters against the plague of atheism.

The topic is essential because atheism has become an epidemic spreading in an unfortunate way. So what do we do as servants against this epidemic?

Through five points are:

1. A servant should know what atheism is to be able to confront this epidemic or this thought.
2. A servant should know what the reason behind atheism is.
3. We should study arguments for God's existence. To confront the thought of atheism, some ideas point out and prove with evidence that God exists.
4. Study the intellectual and logical contradictions in the thought of atheism.
5. How can a servant learn essential skills in debating with an atheist or a person struggling with atheistic thoughts?

❖ **First: What is Atheism?**

To resist this thought, I must know what atheism is.

Quite simply, there are two types of atheism: **Negative and fierce or aggressive.**

➤ **The negative type says:** I do not have sufficient evidence to indicate God's existence or convince me that God exists.

➤ **The more aggressive type says:** I have evidence that God does not exist. Most of the time, this evidence is about evil, pain, and so on.

Atheism has many different names and shapes. For example, **there are sects like:**

- **Agnosticism:** I don't know if God exists or not.
- **Relativism:** I'm right and you're right too. There's no absolute truth for either of us. Every person has his own truth, which he invented or leans toward it.
- **Skepticism:** I doubt that God exists.
- **Naturalism:** It is that this creation or the universe is all that exists and there is nothing supernatural about this nature.

What does an atheist believe?

An atheist believes that there is no God or there is Satan. Some say that an atheist does not believe in the existence of God. But I want to know atheism in another way, which is that the atheist believes in the non-existence of God because atheism in and of itself is a doctrine or thought.

Example: Every atheist, believer, or any other religion must answer existential questions from within. Every philosophical thought answers these existential questions.

What are these existential questions? Where did I come from? What is my purpose in life or the world? Where do I go?, Beyond the grave? Where do I go after death?

All philosophers in ancient and modern times discussed existential questions and wrote a lot of literature about existential questions that a person cannot escape from. He must ask himself where I come from and why I am here. And where am I going? Every religion and every sect responds to these existential questions with thought and belief, including the atheist, because the atheist has an idea when you ask them where you came from. He has a thought, opinion, or belief: cyclical development, randomness, coincidence, whatever these reasons or responses to this question are. Where do you go after death? The atheist says that he will not exist after death, life will perish after death, and I will live. If there is thought and belief that there are responses to the causes of existentialism, then we say that atheism is: a belief that God does not exist.

Atheist Beliefs (His Belief):

1. He believes that God does not exist.
2. Outside of this supernatural or metaphysical universe. He believes that there are no supernatural things, that nature is all that exists, and that there is nothing
3. There are no miracles, and everything that exists is nature.
4. And there is no sin, to whom do you sin and God does not exist?
5. This universe is made of matter, and humans are also made of matter.

6. Darwinian evolution is a scientific fact, not just a theory.
7. Morals and values are relative matter that depends on the person or the situation that person is in.
8. There is no life after death.

✍ These are the beliefs of an atheist.

❖ **Second: Reasons for atheism**: It can be summarized in three reasons or types, namely:

- Intellectual reasons.
- Psycho-emotional reasons.
- Voluntary reasons.

The human soul is composed of three elements:

- **Mind**: knowledge, reason, thought, and intellect.
- **Heart**: sensations, feelings, and emotions.
- **Will**: behaviors.

The reasons for atheism are also in the mind, in the heart, or they will

- **Intellectual reasons**: Atheists say, for example: that the doctrine or thought of atheism or atheists seem to be more cultured than those who believe in the existence of God because we live now in the age of science, the age of development, the age of intellectual openness, and so on, when I began to read, study and research scientific books without discrimination, my thought began says to me: If you do not see or hear this thing or can contain it with your knowledge, then it does not exist. Of course, I will not be able to see God with my uncovered eyes, and I will not be able to touch Him or hear Him with my ears, so the result is that God does not exist. Hence, I became a person pursuing science and knowledge. Science says that if something is neither visible nor tangible nor audible, then it does not exist. Many believe that there is a contradiction between science and faith so in order to be a scientist or study science; I must leave the belief in the existence of God to the people who follow superstitions.
- Intellectual reasons can be called the pride of the mind. This reminds me of a verse in Psalm 10: "The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts." (Psalm 10:4)
- Also, for intellectual reasons: **lack of knowledge** of whether God exists or not. We all know the famous verse in the Book of Hosea: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." (Hosea 4: 6)

Lack of knowledge is a very important point:

When our sons and daughters have questions for the servants, there are logical questions that have answers. Therefore, a servant must be armed with logical answers to these questions and must have sufficient logical answers to these questions.

Important point: Not every question has a logical answer; otherwise, there would be no place for faith, but it does not mean that there is a place for faith where we should not answer any question. It answers the question and leaves room for both reason and faith, logic and faith. The mind takes you to a particular place or stage in your understanding, but faith raises you to what is above the reason. The mind does not comprehend God, and you cannot contain Him with your mind, but there are questions that I can understand with my mind. I can understand the answers to these questions with my mind and take me to what is beyond reason: faith. When my son or daughter in the service asks me questions, I cannot tell them not to ask such questions. Instead, I must say to him to ask as you want, and I will answer him. If I do not have an answer to this question, I answer that I do not know, but let us search together for answers to these questions, but some questions can only be answered by faith.

- **Wrong teaching about God:** Atheists deny an angry, violent, stern, cruel, seemingly self-loving, narcissistic God. He will cast you into hell if you do not follow his commandments. This idea formed in the mind of atheists that God is fierce and you must listen to his words or else... and so on. Who would love a God like this? Some atheists in America described the God they deny as a God who, if his creation does not hear his words, would throw them into hell; he is such a harsh and strict God. They mentioned some examples from the Old and New Testaments that they do not like this God who makes people weak (love your enemies). And so on. I say to them, I am an atheist towards this God. This is not the God whom I worship. My God is not a cruel, violent, selfish, self-loving God who throws His creation into hell.

Sayings of some philosophers in past eras:

- “Karl Marx” (Marxism): hated the God who drugged the poor with the idea of an afterlife. Hence, he came up with a system called communism.
- “Friedrich Nietzsche”: hated a weak god who demanded weak morals, such as loving one’s enemies.

- “Jean-Paul Sartre”: hated a god who assaulted human freedom because he believed that God tightened on us, had too many boundaries, and restricted our freedom.

All this is wrong teaching about God.

- **Emotional, Psychological and Educational Reasons:** When I say to my son or daughter, you must do this; otherwise, God will be mad at you. This makes them feel guilty that God will be angry at them if they don't attend church early. Likewise, God will be mad at you if you do not take Holy Communion. This makes them believe that God is waiting for them to make a mistake to punish them if they don't do what He wants them to do. Hence, I am building a wrong idea about God. For example, when I see a stumbling block or hypocrite, someone who behaves inside the church in a way and behaves differently outside of the church. Hypocrisy, offence, and feeling guilty are psychological and educational mistakes.
The Problem of Evil and Pain: I am angry at God for leaving evil in the world. Why are all people sick? Death bothers me. Hence, I say that God is neither merciful nor compassionate nor loving because He left evil in the world. This is wrong teaching about God.
- **Voluntary Reasons**, which is moral corruption, I don't want to believe that God exists because I want to live as I want. Atheists reject the existence of God because they do not want to change their lifestyle. This was a very explicit verse in the Holy Bible, said by the Lord of glory, Jesus Christ: “And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.” (John 3: 19)

This was a summary of the causes of atheism.

- ✚ Intellectual reasons: wrong teaching about God, lack of knowledge, or intellectual pride.
- ✚ Psycho-emotional reasons: wrong upbringing, the problem of evil and pain.
- ✚ Voluntary reasons: This is moral corruption.

❖ Third: The Importance of Knowing Arguments Pointing to the Existence of God:

How can I resist atheism and protect my sons and daughters from this thought?

First, I must know, research, and study arguments pointing to the existence of God. Second, I must answer this question with logical, philosophical, scientific,

and historical arguments if God exists. There are so many arguments that point to the existence of God, including but not limited to the following:

- **The Cosmological Argument for the existence of God:**

Where did the universe come from?

There is an argument that everything that begins to exist has a cause; the universe and everything in it began to live; hence, the universe has a reason.

What is the reason for the existence of this universe?

There are four causes or possibilities:

1. The universe came out of no existence.

2. The universe came from nothing.

3. The universe is eternal, i.e., it has no beginning.

4. The universe was created.

✦ Of course, the universe cannot come from any existence because nothing can come from nothing.

✦ The universe can't have created itself or formed itself. This is philosophically illogical.

✦ Science has proven that the universe is not eternal, but instead, it has a beginning.

✦ Then, the universe was created. The universe is composed of matter from the element of time and the element of space. Then, whoever created this universe must be above the element of matter, i.e., immaterial, time and space, and omnipotent, to be able to design the universe in such a manner. He must be omniscient to know how to create this universe and life in it. The one who formed this universe must have a mind and not just matter because the mind generates a will. The first reason or cause in the formation of this universe must have the will to create. This 'will,' comes from the mind, which is why he must be rational, non-temporal, unlimited, immaterial, omniscient, and omnipotent. All these attributes are consistent with the characteristics of the Lord of Glory, Jesus Christ, the God we worship and love.

There is also the cosmological argument, the moral argument, and the design argument for this universe. There are so many arguments. The servant must know the logical statements that point to the existence of God to resist this epidemic. In his studies in Sunday school or other fields, we can then discuss whether God exists. We must examine these arguments with our sons and daughters to understand that the faith we believe in is not blind faith, but instead, we think, see, read and study

these arguments while leaving room for faith; because apologetics cannot answer everything.

❖ Fourth: Logical and Intellectual Contradictions in the Thought of Atheism:

Some of these contradictions include but are not limited to the following:

- ➔ The atheist says only materialistic things have existence, and everything has a material cause. What is the thought and theory that brought you to atheism? It cannot have a material cause. As if the atheist says only material things have existence except for the laws of logic and reason, through which I was able to reach this conclusion, which is that God, does not exist.
- ➔ Another contradiction is that atheist says that man does not have free will. Among the most famous atheists in America: are “Sam Harris”, “Christopher Hitchens”, “Daniel Dennett”, and “Richard Dawkins”. They say that man is driven and has no choice; that is, he has no will. They call the human being a moist robot of flesh and blood only. I am programmed and guided to walk in a certain way as the universe leads me. Have you concluded that God does not exist of your own free will? Or are you programmed to say that God does not exist? If you are programmed to say that God does not exist, then why am I not programmed like you to believe that God does not exist if we, as you say, consist of some machines (robots)? Why is there a difference; in belief?
- ➔ There is another philosophical contradiction, in which the atheist says that there is no evil in this world.
Richard Dawkins, one of the most famous atheists in Oxford, England, wrote a book called *The Selfish Gene*, which says that there is no evil in this world and there is no god. If he said there is no evil, he would have to explain where evil came from and its nature because we know it exists. We define and diagnose evil as the absence of good, just as death is the absence of life, darkness is the absence of light, and cold is the absence of heat. If God does not exist, how do I know evil? Evil is the absence of goodness. Where did righteousness or goodness come from? It comes from the law. That law says this is good, and this is evil. There is a standard that measures what is good and what is evil. Who made this standard? What is the definition of evil? How can I understand the nature of evil? In another book called “*The God delusion*,” the same person, “Richard Dawkins,” says I do not believe in an evil and cruel God. This is

a philosophical and logical contradiction. He says that there is no evil, and here he says that he is an evil and uncaring God.

I must study and understand this contradiction to discuss it with my sons and daughters and let them know that there is an intellectual and logical contradiction in atheism.

❖ **Fifth: Important Skills in Dealing with An Atheist:**

- ✓ If my son or daughter in the service asks me or if they have challenges in faith or atheistic thought, I first ask these questions. Of course, I must not speak much nor preach or give those lectures. However, the first thing I must do is to ask important questions, which are: Explain this thought to me or give me examples. Where did this thought come from? What evidence is this thought based on...etc. We should ask as many questions as possible because through these questions, we can understand the problem and what is the reason? Is it in mind, in the heart, or in the will?

To answer an atheist, I must know the reasons and the source.

Then, before you speak, ask to know and understand, then start responding. Of course, the answer should be accompanied by prayer. "Lord, give me the ability to answer this thought and this belief...etc." The servant should first live a life of prayer so that by the grace of the Holy Spirit, he may be able to answer, respond, and fortify his sons and daughters against this severe epidemic of atheism.

There are ten fundamental questions we should use in the debates to know and understand how to respond:

1. Where did the universe come from? (Simple and logical question)
2. Where did life come from? Is there a designer who designed this universe?
3. Who created this universe with such accuracy?
4. Who determines what is right or wrong? What is the source of ethics, and where did it come from?
5. What is the purpose of life? What is the meaning of life?
6. Where do we go after death? Is there life after death? Does death eliminate the existence of man?
7. Do you trust your mind? Do you trust that it leads you to the truth?
8. Are you made up of flesh and blood only, or do you have a human spirit and soul? What are your components as a human being?

9. Do you have free will, or are you driven or programmed like a robot from birth until you leave this world?
10. Do you have absolute knowledge that you know what you see and what you cannot see also? For example, do you know what is in nature or what is supernatural or metaphysical?
- ✓ Another important principle, when discussing with a person with atheistic thoughts, is to focus on the fundamentals. If someone says, for example, I do not believe in the Holy Bible, why? Because it contains stories that seem to be mythical such as the story of Jonah inside of the whale. This is against science and logic. Likewise, the story of Moses splitting the sea, the flood, and many other stories in the Old Testament seem to be stories against science and logic. Hence, I do not believe in the Holy Bible or God's existence. Of course, there are responses to these stories, but I cannot understand them without understanding the New Testament. The New Testament gives me the lens through which I can understand the Old Testament.

I should focus on the fundamentals: the Christian faith is based on certain fundamentals which I should focus on:

- ➔ Who is Jesus Christ?
- ➔ The nature of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- ➔ What did He say, and what did He do? (The concept of redemption)
- ➔ Is our Lord Jesus Christ a historical figure?
- ➔ Is there evidence that He took a human body, incarnated and lived on earth 2000 years ago?
- ➔ Is there evidence indicating that?

There are so many, and there are proofs not only inside the Holy Bible, but there is also evidence outside the Holy bible.

- “Flavius Josephus”, a Jewish historian, in his book “Antiquities of the Jews,” wrote in detail about the fact of the existence of the Lord of Glory, Jesus Christ. He also noted that He performed miracles and had 12 disciples who followed Him. He wrote many things about our Lord Jesus Christ outside the Holy Bible. There are so many other reasons and historians who wrote about our Lord Jesus Christ.

Who is Jesus Christ? What did He do for us? He is the redemption.

- **St. Paul** preached in his first epistle to the Corinthians, in one of his most important chapters, which was called by some of the fathers “the Old Creed of faith.” It is a significant chapter in “the Pauline” of the feast of the Resurrection and in funerals. It says, “**For I delivered to you first of all**

that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4), these are the fundamentals on which the Christian faith is built. When my son or daughter talks about the stories of the Old Testament, I answer him: first, let us focus on the fundamental of the Christian faith, who is Jesus Christ? He is God manifested in the flesh as St. Paul, the apostle, said, **“Great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh.”** (1Timothy 3:16). What does it mean God appeared in the flesh? I explain the meaning of the incarnation and the nature of Christ, and I do not enter into theological dialogues but explain the nature of Christ.

- Was our Lord Jesus Christ crucified or not? Did He rise from the dead or not? Is there scientific and historical evidence indicating the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ and His resurrection? Yes, there are, and we research this evidence.

The New Testament is the telescope through which I can understand the events of the Old Testament.

Many websites talk about “arguments of the existence of God.” There are more than 20 logical and philosophical arguments that talk about the existence of God. We must study and see these arguments so that we can answer the questions of our children. Not every question has an answer, but many questions do. We give room for faith to the questions above reason and logic because the God we worship and love is above reason and logic. However, this does not contradict reason or logic. We must study logical contradictions in the thought of atheism to understand the logical and philosophical contradictions in this thought. The last point is that we should learn skills to deal with someone who seems to be struggling with atheistic beliefs. We should ask him the questions to know and understand how to respond and focus on the fundamentals.

In the end, we can deal with this issue purely rationally, but this is not the solution. As a servant, you should start the conversation with prayer and not rely on your intellectual way or skills. Again, this is not the solution, but rather the solution is to ask our Lord to support you with the answer because your children in the ministry are His children. Hence, we ask God to protect us from this epidemic and bless your service.

Glory be to God Forever Amen.

