

# World Religions

*Better understanding our neighbors and their beliefs*

## Week Seven: Secularism/Atheism

**Series overview:** As we get to know our neighbors, many of us are met with a rich collection of people from cultures worldwide. With so many religions and backgrounds represented in our community, you may find yourself wondering more about the people who surround you. What do they believe? How do I relate to people coming from experiences far different from mine? And most of all, how do I interact with my neighbors in a way that shows love and respect?

**This week's message:** Both secularism and atheism are considered religions because they describe a set of beliefs that provide a framework for ultimate reality. These ideologies believe the following:

- Doubt/deny the relevance/existence of God. God is just a projection of our fears & desires. Humans have created God in their image, when in reality the physical world is all there is.
- Everything in existence can be explained by naturalistic processes. Life is evolutionary, therefore, there is no need for God.
- The scientific method of inquiry is the only reliable path to truth.
- There is no credible evidence that life survives death. Therefore, seek happiness now and strive to make a difference in the world instead of waiting for God to save it.

Each of these beliefs come with their own set of problems & challenges. Nevertheless, we see the secular worldview saturating our society and influencing our personal lives in three major ways:

- Privatization of religion – removing religious institutions from any public place (i.e. prayer no longer allowed in schools, taking “one nation under God” out of the pledge of allegiance, etc.)
- Decline of religious practices within religious people – including downward trends in church going, Muslim women no longer wearing their hijabs (head coverings), etc.
- All truth claims are contestable – meaning no one really has the final truth, as all truths are vulnerable to critique, analysis, changing cultural views, reason, etc.

## Small Group Discussion:

### ➤ Connect

- How have you seen the secularization of society influence believers' expressions of faith?
- Are there people in your neighborhood or workplace who have never heard you verbally profess to be a Christian?

### ➤ Grow

- Which of the challenges to secular/atheist beliefs, as presented by Pastor Tim, had you not considered before?
- Have you embraced secularism by believing that people in your spheres of influence will know you follow Jesus by the fact that you're nice? How does this line up with the way Jesus lived his life?
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-20. How does this challenge the idea that "my personal relationship with Jesus is personal"?
- As believers, we claim our relationship with Christ is the most important thing. However, we fail to follow through with our commitments when something more valuable to us comes up, and there are Biblical commands we refuse to follow. How have you seen this in your own life when it comes to practicing your faith? (i.e. forgiveness, setting the Sabbath apart, obeying spiritual leaders, your church attendance, obeying Matthew 28:19-20)
- Do you structure your choices and priorities around the Bible, or do you consider the Bible one opinion among the many valid ones presented in our culture/by the people around you?
- Read 2 Timothy 3:16. Why does picking and choosing our authority of truth an issue? How do we practically go about structuring our decisions around the Bible?

### ➤ Reach

- One City. Think of one person who does not know you are a Christian because they have heard you say as much. Have a conversation with them this week so that will no longer be the case.
- One Nation. Pray for our country – that believers across the nation will stop embracing forms of secularism; that the Bible will reign as our sole truth authority.
- One World. Do research on the most atheistic countries in the world, find them on a map, and pray for them.

## Prayer Focus

Pray Deuteronomy 6:5-9 over yourself and the Church. Ask for God to help you love Him with everything you have. Ask Him to remind you of who He is. Ask for boldness in talking about spiritual things with others.

## Scripture Memory

*"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

Matthew 28:19-20