

# How To "Uncreate"

# An Atheist

*By*

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It happens every day around the world. A Christian teenager goes away to college and returns an atheist. How does that happen? How can someone who grows up in a Christian home and church be turned so quickly from their faith in Christ? I can tell you how it happened to me.

My story could have come straight out of Peter Boghossian's new book, "A Manual for Creating Atheists." An atheist world religion professor in my first semester of college worked very hard at convincing students from Christian homes that God did not exist. I was prime for what he did because of what my church had not done for me. The same thing is being done every day in colleges around the world.

Both of my parents were Christians and we attended Baptist churches wherever we lived. My mother's mother lived with us when I was a little boy and she was also a Christian. Sundays were all about church. We attended Sunday School and morning worship, then went home to eat and rest before returning to church for Training Union and evening worship. We also attended church every Wednesday night and other nights during the week for special meetings, conferences, etc. My parents were heavily involved in supporting Baptist missionaries around the world and eventually retired and became home missionaries for almost 20 years.

The churches we attended had active children and youth ministries. The emphasis was on “knowing” things, so I did well in that environment. I was able to answer questions with the right answers and find references in the Bible faster than other children. It was well known that children in our church should be saved and baptized by the age of 12, so I “walked the aisle” of the church during one of the many verses of “Just As I Am” on a Sunday morning and told the pastor I wanted to be saved and baptized. I was 10-years-old, certainly old enough to make that decision, so everyone seemed very happy with what I had done. I attended mandatory classes for children who were candidates for baptism and learned what to do and say during the baptismal service. When my turn came to be baptized, I did and said what was expected and became a member of the church.

Something I didn’t expect was that I would be invited to attend church business meetings when I turned 12. I thought that was pretty grownup and cool, until ... I attended one of “those” business meetings where tempers flare, harsh words are shouted across the aisles, and the underbelly of the church shows its fury.

What came up during that meeting was the firing of the church’s youth pastor. Adults were passionate for and against and some pretty tough words were tossed around the church worship center. I sat in my seat stunned and disheartened by the news. All of us kids loved our youth pastor. He was kind, loving and lots of fun. He was somebody we could talk to when no one else would listen. As I

remember it, that was the day that eventually led to the creation of an atheist.

I was angry with the adults involved in the firing of our youth pastor and those who supported the decision. I saw them in a new light. Their hypocrisy loomed large in front of me. My anger grew week by week until I no longer wanted to attend church. I became interested in martial arts in junior high school and began studying about Eastern religions. When I was a junior and senior in high school I pulled out of many of the school and church activities that had kept me engaged for years. I spent more time reading the writings of people like Bertrand Russell and David Hume.

My parents were concerned about the road I was traveling and thought working at a denominational church camp might be a good experience for me. What it did was introduce me to other young people who were having similar struggles with their faith in God and were further along in their rebellion. I had just graduated from high school. Many of them were college students with more “real world” experience.

The summer I was working at the church camp was the same summer the news came out that John Lennon had pronounced Christianity in decline and the Beatles “more popular than Jesus.” I remember hearing the news and seeing Christians from all over the campground bring their Beatle records and posters into the middle of a courtyard to burn them in protest of what Lennon had said. Some of

the kids seemed serious, but it was just something to do for many of them on a warm summer evening. I thought the whole thing was a bit weird.

I started college a couple of weeks after getting home from summer camp. I remember walking into the Studies in World Religions class and seeing a serious-looking professor behind a large desk. Once we were seated at our desks he went to work evangelizing us for atheism. He questioned everything we had ever been told about Christianity. He threw up reason after reason about why Christianity could not possibly be true because religion was based on the theory of the existence of God and there was no proof that God existed. If God did not exist, how could a non-existent God have a son who would be born of a virgin and die for our sins? Where was the proof that Jesus had ever existed? Where was the proof that the ancient texts of the Bible weren't written by madmen? Day after day the professor hammered away at every belief of the Christian faith claiming that there was absolutely no evidence for it. I had no interest in standing up to the professor in defense of Christianity. I even found what he said enlightening. Taking the final step into atheism was just around the corner from that class.

My path to atheism began long before attending an atheist professor's religion class. It began with Christians and churches that did not prepare me to believe in God. Because I was not prepared to believe, I was not prepared to defend. When I did become a theist years later, I immediately began focusing on how to defend

Christianity to atheists and how to prepare young people to believe in God and defend their faith. Why? Because of people like my professor and Peter Boghossian.

Dr. Boghossian is a fellow martial artist, so we have something in common. Martial artists have a special code of honor and respect. Something else we have in common is the deep desire to impact the lives of people. The State of Oregon has funded his research studies in helping prison inmates increase their critical thinking and moral reasoning abilities. The goal is “to increase their desistance to criminal behavior” (Biography of Dr. Peter Boghossian, Portland State University). He also teaches in hospitals, public and private schools, seminaries, colleges and universities (Biography). His specialties are in critical thinking, science and pseudoscience, atheism and new atheism. Dr. Boghossian is a national speaker for the Secular Student Alliance and an international speaker for the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science. He has also written many papers and articles on the subject of philosophy, skepticism and atheism, and now has a new book, “A Manual for Creating Atheists.”

If we had met during the '60s, I believe Dr. Boghossian and I could have been friends; maybe even trained together in martial arts and shared together about the philosophy of atheism. He would have been a great guest for my atheist radio talk show. However, that will not happen now because of something that happened to me more than 40 years ago. I looked at the evidence for the existence of God and the claims of Christianity and became a theist and Christian.

While that strikes my atheist friends as strange and very “un-atheistic,” it makes complete sense to me. I went through it all – the creation of an atheist to the new creation of a theist.

The timing of Dr. Boghossian’s new book is probably very good for the atheistic movement. It has been floundering for decades. The arguments atheists use today are the same old, tired arguments I used almost 45 years ago. “A Manual for Creating Atheists” may change that. As one reviewer of the book wrote, “Up to now, most atheists have simply criticized religion in various ways, but the point is to dispel it” (Dr. Jerry Coyne). The goal of Dr. Boghossian’s book is to prepare atheists to attack religion at what they think is its weakest point – reliance on faith rather than evidence.

While that has a rather ominous tone, it is certainly too soon to begin digging Christianity’s grave. The reason is that we have a **mountain of evidence** to support the claims of theism and Christianity. Even as Dr. Boghossian and other atheists plan their attack and mount their great steeds of reason and critical thinking, it is time for the Church to hear the battle cry and prepare an army of apologists to defend the faith and prepare the next generation of Christian soldiers.

Now is not the time for fear, doubt or pulling back. God has called us to go forward and take our stand – “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore take up the whole

armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”

The first step in “standing to withstand” is to put on what Paul calls the “belt of truth” (Ephesians 6:14). While I was taught “what” to believe growing up in a Christian church, I was not taught “why” to believe it. Truth is more than just who, what, when, where and how. It’s also “why.”

**WHY** is the missing piece that makes all the difference in creating or un-creating an atheist. If someone had taken the time to train me as a child and teenager in understanding the “why” to the “what,” I may have never become an atheist. Theism makes all the sense in the world when we know why it’s true. The Christian’s first defense against the onslaught of atheism’s attacks on faith is the truth and why it’s true. Knowing the truth of God’s existence prepares us to defend theism. Knowing the truth of Christ’s existence prepares us to defend Christianity. We begin where we must – by standing surrounded by and held together by “truth.”

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