

I. By nearly any normal ethical standard, we are utter moral failures

A. By our own childhood standards of right and wrong, we are moral failures

1. How many behaviors are you now engaged in that would have horrified the five-year-old version of you?
2. How many behaviors are you now engaged in that will horrify the sixty-year-old version of you?

B. By the moral standards to which we hold others, we are moral failures

1. If we call for social justice, how much money do we give to the poor?
2. If we call for fidelity in marriage, do we use pornography?
3. If we call for personal responsibility, do we ever cut corners at work?

C. By the standards of atheistic systems of ethics, we are moral failures

1. Ethicist Peter Singer argues that consuming meat is unethical
2. Author Sam Harris argues that we may be ethically obligated “to work tirelessly to alleviate the hunger of every last stranger [on earth] as though it were our own.” [The End of Faith, p. 286]

D. By the standards of the great religions of the world, we are moral failures

1. We fail to keep the Five Pillars of Islam
2. We fail to obey the “ten precepts” or the “eight precepts” or the “five precepts” of Buddhism
3. We fail to obey the Ten Commandments

E. By the standards of the two great commandments cited by Jesus, we are moral failures

1. We fail to “love the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength”
2. We fail to “Love our neighbor as ourselves”
3. We violate the simple quantitative conditions stipulated by Jesus: “all our strength” and “as ourselves”
4. Note that love, not behavior alone, is what is mandated by Jesus. All the moral behavior in the world without love is a violation of these commandments.

II. Only Christianity offers complete forgiveness and acceptance to utter moral failures

A. Only Christianity has such a radical view of the nature of human sin

1. The Bible affirms that we are ‘dead in sin’, ‘powerless’, ‘objects of wrath’
2. The Bible affirms that we are completely helpless to save ourselves

B. Only Christianity has such a radical view of God’s grace

1. The Bible states that God pours out his love on the ungodly, the sinful and the undeserving
2. The Bible states that God’s forgiveness and acceptance is complete and total

C. Only Christianity says that our acceptance comes as a free gift based solely on trust in Another

1. The Bible states that nothing we do contributes to or merits God’s salvation in Christ
2. The Bible declares that Jesus bore the full penalty of God’s wrath on our sin so that we could be forgiven completely by grace

III. Therefore, I ought to want Christianity to be true, even if I think it is false

A. A person who truly accepts both premises and desires forgiveness above all else ought to be a Christian

1. Food court analogy: Imagine that I am waiting in a long line in front of Five Guys at a food court in the mall. An atheist approaches me and says “You know, there is no Five Guys. It doesn’t exist. Why waste your time here? Why not try some of the other restaurants?” This is a reasonable suggestion. But if I am dying of thirst in the middle of the desert and see an oasis in the distance and atheist might object: “That oasis is an illusion. Why waste your time pursuing it?” That is not a reasonable suggestion because there is no other option. If I know that I am a moral failure and there is even a possibility that Christianity is true, then we ought to pursue it with our whole heart.

B. Objection: This argument does not prove that Christianity is true.

1. That is not the goal of this argument. The goal of this argument is to expose our deepest motivations

C. Objection: I do not care whether Christianity is true because I do not think I am a moral failure

1. That is probably not true. Conscience is God-given and very tenacious, even when suppressed
2. Encourage hearers to practice honest introspection in light of Jesus' preaching, especially the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew) or the Sermon on the Plain (Luke)

D. Objection: I do not care whether Christianity is true because I do not believe in objective right or wrong

1. That is also probably not true. Real practical relativism is rare, despite peoples' intellectual claims
2. Ask: "Tomorrow, if you decided that it would increase your happiness to kill your wife and children with an axe, would this action be wrong in any objective sense?"
3. Thought experiment: "Imagine I had an amorality pill. If you took it, it would annihilate all of your negative moral emotions like guilt and empathy, leaving positive emotions like happiness fully intact. In this state, you would be able to kill your family with an axe and feel no pangs of conscience, even if you chose not to do so for pragmatic reasons. Would you take the pill?" If they hesitate, ask why? Does this fit into a relativistic worldview?

E. Objection: I do not care whether Christianity is true because I do not care about being a good person

1. This is also probably not true.
2. If it is true, point out that it merely serves to strengthen premise 1. Only a truly evil person cares nothing about doing what is right

F. Objection: I believe that God loves and accepts everyone

1. How do you know that such a God exists?
2. Ironically, a God of less wrath than the biblical God is a God of less love than the biblical God. It costs nothing for this "all-loving" God to love the wicked. But on the cross, it cost the God of the Bible *everything* to love the wicked (H/T Tim Keller).

IV. Related arguments

A. A near-universal existential need for God suggests the objective existence of God

1. Universal needs generally have some correspondence to objective reality
 - a. Humans hunger; food exists.
 - b. Humans thirst; water exists.
 - c. "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." – C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*
2. Objection: Our near-universal existential need for God was hard-wired by evolution to benefit survival
 - a. Is there any evidence for this claim?
 - b. It does not logically follow that God does not exist.
 - c. We might make the same claim about belief in the objective universe; do we also doubt the existence of the objective universe?

B. On atheism, it is neither good nor obligatory to believe or pursue the truth

1. If the atheist objects that an existential need for God to exist doesn't mean that God truly exists, we on what ground he thinks that 'believing the truth' is good or obligatory? In other words, why am I not warranted to pursue belief in God merely because it meets my existential needs? Why is 'pursuing true beliefs' better or more justified than 'pursuing beliefs that makes me happy'?
2. Consequently, the doubting Christian is on precisely the same pragmatic footing as the atheist