

Mark Banks: "Astronomy (not Astrology)"

Our January meeting will be a talk by **Mark Banks** about the fascinating subject of Astronomy (not astrology). We will start exploring with our ancient ancestors who spent their entire lives out under the stars. Then, we will move along to the Renaissance and the birth of our modern science of Astronomy. Then we will learn about a review of our journey to the present and future of stellar exploration.

Mark Banks has been a long term member of AFS, a retired aerospace engineer, an avid amateur Astronomer and past president of the Atlanta Astronomy Club (2010-2018).

AFS January Meeting Jan 12, 2025 1:00-2:30 PM (eastern)

To join Zoom meeting go to this link:
us02web.zoom.us/j/89006560911
Also at Atlanta Freethought Hall

The three elected 2025 board members are as follows. Thank you to all those who ran; your service is most appreciated:

- Paul Broman**
- Michael Buckner**
- Hollow Horned**

AFS Calendar

Jan 12	Potluck Lunch	11 am
Jan 12	General Meeting (Live/Online)	1 pm
Feb 9	Board Meeting	11 am
Feb 9	General Meeting (Live/Online)	1 pm
Mar 9	Potluck Lunch	11 am
Mar 9	General Meeting (Live/Online)	1 pm
Apr 13	Board Meeting	11 am
Apr 13	General Meeting (Live/Online)	1 pm
May 11	Potluck Lunch	11 am
May 11	General Meeting (Live/Online)	1 pm

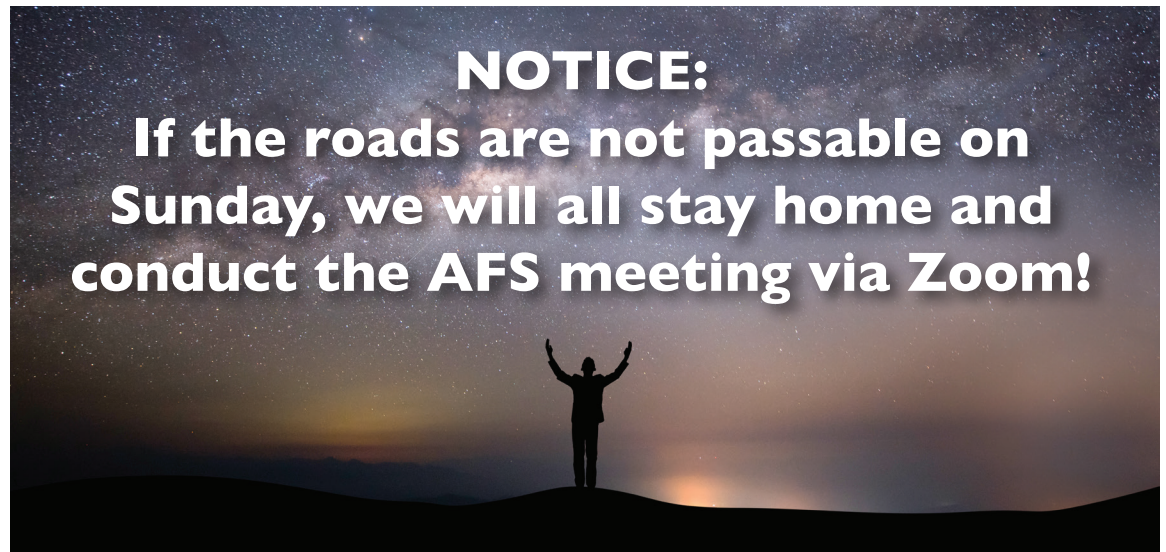
All events are combo Live/Zoom unless noted and are subject to change.

The January Potluck

Before the January 12th meeting we will have a Potluck Lunch, starting at 11:00. Join AFS members and guests for some good food and great socializing. Please bring food according to the first letter of your last name:

- A-G: Bring a main dish**
- H-P: Bring a dessert**
- Q-Z: Bring a side dish**

AFS will provide drinks, plates and silverware.



Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at AF Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Atlanta, GA, 30339 and also presented online (see link on page 1). Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:30 for socializing. Visitors are always welcome.

The views and opinions expressed by speakers at AFS do not necessarily reflect those of AFS members or its policy. Announced events are subject to change.



- 12 Jan Mark Banks on astronomy
- 9 Feb Karen Stolnow and Matt Baxter
- 9 Mar TBA
- 13 Apr TBA
- 11 May TBA

AFS Email List

The AFS Announcements email list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities. Send an email to AFS-Announce-subscribe@yahoogroups.com to subscribe. The AFS Forum email list is a place for discussions of freethought, atheism, agnosticism, church-state separation and religion. To subscribe to this list, send an email to AFSForum-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. The AFS Facebook page is at facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought. For calendar information on AFS activities, please join the [Meetup group](#). The AFS website is www.atlantafreethought.org. To keep up to date on the Atlanta Freethought Society calendar of upcoming events, please join our Meetup group: meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society.

The Atlanta Freethought Society is a member-run organization dedicated to advancing freethought and protecting the rights and reputation of freethinkers, agnostics, atheists and humanists.

We welcome anyone who is interested in learning about living a good life free from religion through attending AFS speeches, debates, and discussions. We employ protests, letters to the editor, broadcast appearances, and any other reasonable and civil means available to achieve our mission.

We define freethought as “the forming of opinions about life in general and religion in particular on the basis of reason and the evidence of our senses, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief.”

We actively support a strict separation of church and state as the best means to guarantee liberty for all, regardless of religious belief or lack of belief.

We seek to educate ourselves on many topics but especially on religion and non-religion. We do this through a series of thought-provoking speakers and programs, and by maintaining a web forum and an extensive library of freethought, religious, and related books, pamphlets, videotapes, and audiotapes.

We provide an organization where freethinkers and non-theists can develop friendships, talk freely, socialize and enjoy each other’s company. We do not discriminate against anyone on such irrelevant grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, or physical disability. We welcome members and leaders of all political parties and preferences. Any who are like-minded are welcome to join us.

Because we are designated by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) educational organization, contributions to AFS are tax deductible.

Views, opinions, positions or strategies expressed by authors are theirs alone and do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, positions or strategies of the Atlanta Freethought Society or any member thereof. The editors of *Atlanta Freethought News* reserve the right to edit or alter in any manner it sees fit any articles deemed to be obscene, offensive, defamatory, threatening, in violation of trademark, copyright or other laws, or is otherwise unacceptable; and also to correct grammar and to conserve space.

Atlanta Freethought News An AFS Publication

Editor: Laura Ross
Assistant Editor: Steve Yothment

How to Contact the Editor

Send correspondence to AFS at:
4775 N. Church Lane SE,
Atlanta, GA 30339,
phone Laura at 404-634-1005, or send
e-mail to Laura@LauraRossDesign.com
or luara.mom@gmail.com

2025 Board of Directors

Paul Broman
Michael Buckner
Beth Davis
Hollow Horned
George Craig
Laura Ross
Steve Yothment

Atlanta Freethought News

Vol. 31, Number 01, January 2025 CE
Copyright © 2025 by the Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc. Signed articles are all copyright © 2025 by their respective authors.

Membership in AFS is \$50/year per person,
\$20 for low income.

Membership includes voting privileges and
AFNews by email/USPS (indicate preferences).

Sustaining Membership is \$100.

Life Membership is \$1000.

Subscriptions only are \$30 for 12 issues.

Please make checks or money orders payable to
Atlanta Freethought Society
(or Paypal to afs@atlantafreethought.org).

Visit our Meetup page at
meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society.

See AFS events and member views at:
facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought.

Send E-mail to
afs@atlantafreethought.org.

AFS Wordpress specialist: Beth Davis
AFS Facebook page: Laura Ross, Ed Buckner,
Steve Yothment

What Would it Take to Get Me (Ed) to Convert to Being a Sincere Christian?

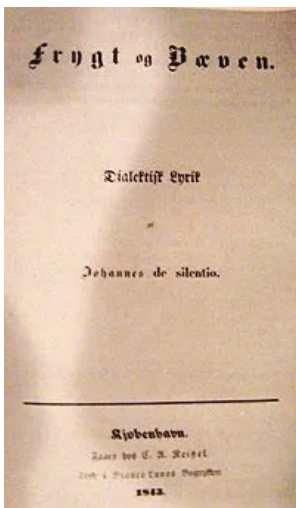
Ed Buckner • Letters to a Free Country

<https://edbuckner.substack.com/p/on-how-to-persuade-me-to-become-a>

To convert me to Christianity, you must do more than merely invite me to church. More than assure me that you really, really believe (I accept that you do—but that doesn't convince me.) More than tell me that it's arrogant not to.

But Everyone You Love Believes—Are You Claiming to Be Better than Them?

When I was growing up—in a thoroughly religious Christian family—I quieted my doubts (temporarily) by telling myself that everyone I knew and loved believed, so why shouldn't I? But I gradually came to realize that all of them, like everyone everywhere, had grown up among people who mostly had the same (or similar) beliefs. World-wide demographics show this beyond any doubt (mine included). *Where* you're born is a much better predictor of what your religious preference is than anything else. That doesn't prove the set of beliefs is wrong—but it sure doesn't prove they're right, either. We all need to look somewhere besides habit and customs to come to the truth, whatever it is.



Title page of Danish first edition of Kierkegaard's book (1843)

Read the Bible—You'll See!

I haven't read all of the Bible (I know atheists who have), but I've read a goodly proportion of it. Enough to know that it contains some good moral lessons, some beautiful language (King James Version, especially), some accurate history, some erotica (if comparisons to horses and donkeys don't intimidate you), and other good things. But it also includes incredible (really) stuff, horrible moral lessons (stone your rebellious teenager to death? Put sabbath breakers to death? Consign non-believers to eternal pain and gnashing of teeth? Live in fear and trembling, as Søren Kierkegaard (Johannes de silentio) and Philippians 2:12 suggests?) No thanks.

And the *Bible* has many ugly and absurd passages, as well as tedious, long series of begats, etc. If reading and accepting what a book says is all it takes, why not the *Book of Mormon*? Or the *Qur'an*? Or any of dozens of others. If you

believe what the *Bible* says, surely it will inspire fear—no one wants to burn forever in a lake of fire (*Book of Revelation*: 19:20, 20:10, 14, 15, and 21:8). But belief? Not unless you already believe—circular logic.

But Christianity is the Only Religion that . . .

. . . promises eternal life and . . . Promises, of any kind, by anyone or any ideology, mean nothing unless those promises can be fulfilled. I fully understand that believing Christians are committed to the idea that is outlined in a variety of biblical verses, most famously John 3:16. Other religions—Islam and Hinduism, notably—promise eternal life, too, though obviously not by the same exact mechanism—believing that a specific person/event “saved” followers. But offering something means nothing if the offer is empty.

Ed, You Just Have to Have Faith!

Faith in what? Why? What reason(s) can you give me that it makes any

sense to have faith?

Look Around You—Haven't You Noticed the Miracle of Newborn Life, the Miracle of the Baby Saved from the Tornado, the ...?

I've seen, or at least read about in the local newspaper, various unusual events that someone has dubbed “a miracle”—but often enough this label just raises questions about why such horrible stuff—tornados, plane crashes, earthquakes, tsunamis—had killed or maimed so many but spared a few now declared “miracles.” The bigger question for me is how I'm supposed to square all the horrors with the supposed presence everywhere, all the time, of an all powerful, all merciful, loving God.

This question—often called “The Problem of Evil”—is not at all new, dating at least back to Epicurus (341 BCE—270 BCE). There have been many, many attempts to explain how an all powerful, all merciful god can coexist with babies getting brain cancer, thousands of people suddenly obliterated in tsunamis, Nazi mass murders, malaria, eye-worms, and so much more. All the explanations I've ever read—“so we can have free will,” etc.—don't begin to explain it well enough for me to even consider believing in the Christian ideas of God.

Heaven—Salvation

A man I loved and respected once asked me if I could see the plusses of eternal life and heaven, of getting to see loved ones who have died again, of being in the presence of God. I said, “Maybe.” He replied, “Well, good—there's hope for you yet.”

It's sort of like winning a big lottery: thinking it'd be grand doesn't mean it would be grand for sure. And thinking it'd be grand doesn't even make it slightly more probable.

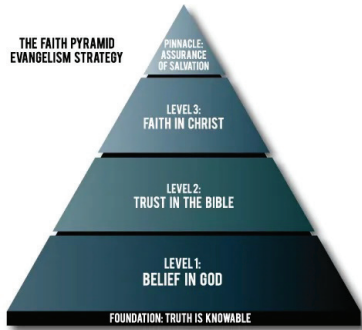
I see some major downsides to eternal life/heaven: perpetual boredom, the distasteful insult to my dignity of eternal worship and gratitude to an apparently vain, even silly, being, etc. But even if an all-powerful God can turn all those downsides to plusses and I get the joy of getting to see those who've gone before, I still can't find my way to believing it's possible. Desirable, maybe. Possible, no, not really..

Sincere Christian continued on page 4

Back to the Basics—What You Must Do FIRST AND IN ORDER If You Seek to Persuade me to Become a Believing Christian

I don't honestly know how hard your task is if you're committed to converting me to becoming a believing Christian—very hard at best. I ceased to be a Christian and believer, gradually, over a period of six to eight years, back in the (roughly) 1960s. I've read or heard thousands of words on the subject since, and none of those changed me. But below is what you gotta do if that's your goal, and you gotta do all this in this order.

First, here's an image of what some preacher posted online that can maybe help:



I. Foundation: Truth is Knowable

He's right—the foundation of any persuasion is to accept that truth is knowable—and on that I harbor some technical doubts, but not serious ones, at least in practical terms.

As René Descartes put it in the 1600s, "I doubt, therefore I am." And if "I am," then it follows fairly closely that reality is. And if "reality is," then accepting that "truth is knowable" isn't far behind. So go ahead and proceed as

if that foundation is sturdy.

2. Belief in God

This one is tough. I have to date seen, heard, and read nothing whatsoever that persuades me that any gods exist. From the 1960s to now: nothing. And I've seen people (including people I love) die, be born, have tremendous triumphs, horrible problems, and more. I have read widely, debated some powerful apologists, had informal discussions with many Christians (and a few Muslims and Jews) who I love and respect, heard sermons, and been in (a few) religious ceremonies. None of it "worked." Biggest problem for me, biggest obstacle to belief, has probably been the Problem of Evil (see above.).

And, remember, as far as your challenge goes, you have to get this one sorted before you move up the pyramid.

3. Trust in the Bible

As mentioned above, I've read lots of biblical passages and have had decidedly mixed responses—but nothing that persuades me to "trust" it. Step 2, above, has to come first—not likely you're going to persuade anyone that a book (or a series of them, of course) is the Word of God unless you first persuade him that there's a god whose word needs to be heard.

But even then, if you do persuade me there's a

Sincere Christian continued on page 5

Become a Member!

(Or renew your membership with this form or online at www.AtlantaFreethought.org!)

Individual memberships: One person can become a member for \$50 per year.

Sustaining memberships: One person can become a sustaining member for \$100 per year.

Life memberships: Avoid the hassle of renewing every year. A \$1000 life membership lasts a lifetime.

Paper newsletter: We encourage members to receive the newsletter by email. This avoids the printing and mailing expenses. But if you really want the paper version of the newsletter, just let us know and we will send it to you at no additional charge. (You can also pick up a paper newsletter at any AFS meeting.)

Thank you for your support! We look forward to your being with us in the coming months!

Membership Dues # of mems Total

Individual	\$50	_____	\$_____
Low Income	\$20	_____	\$_____
Sustaining Member	\$100	_____	\$_____
Life Member	\$1000	_____	\$_____
Subscription only	\$30	_____	\$_____
Extra donation (Thank you!)			\$_____
		Total:	\$_____

Receive PDF of newsletter by email

Receive paper newsletter by post

Name _____

Address: _____

Phone: H _____ W _____

Email: _____

Save time, postage, and keep your hands clean by making a payment via **Paypal** to:
afs@atlantafreethought.org

Sincere Christian Continued from pg. 4

god, you'd still have major struggles to persuade me that the One you have in mind is really the One who wrote—or inspired or dictated—all those books of the Old and New Testament. And not the other holy books on offer (see above).

4. Faith in Christ

If you can get past the earlier hurdles/levels, this one will probably—assuming you managed to get throughout just the Old Testament but the New as well—fairly painless. After all, if I trust in the Bible, then John 3:16—

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. —King James Version

Will likely get you past all the contradictions and absurdities.

5. Assurance of Salvation—Heaven

The ultimate and, probably, the easiest. But only if the other, preceding steps in the pyramid are taken and conquered.

An extremely challenging, hard road. So, you either better somehow get cracking. OR. Maybe, choose a new mission field, Fred B., LJ, “Sunny,” and others. With high regards, Ed B.

A repeat from that January 2023 Letter—

Some Good Books to Counter the Alleged Good Book—and More

Compiled, February 2017, and revised in 2022, by Ed Buckner (edbuckner.substack.com)

Barker, Dan. *God: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction*, New York: Sterling, 2016. A detailed if sarcastic look at the God of the Bible.

Blaker, Kimberly, ed. *The Fundamentals of Extremism: The Christian Right in America*, New Boston Books, 2003. As the title suggests, a collection of essays regarding Christian fundamentalists in the US.*

Buckner, Edward M. and Michael E. Buckner. *In Freedom We Trust: An Atheist Guide to Religious Liberty*, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2012. Comprehensive defense of American secularism (church-state separation) and refutation of the idea that the US is—or should be—a Christian nation.*

Darwin, Charles. *On the Origin of Species: By Means of Natural Selection or The Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*. New York: The Heritage Press, 1963 (original edition, 1859). The classic statement on evolutionary theory; includes (for any with eyes to see and brains to think) refutations of nearly every creationist claim from recent times.**

Dawkins, Richard. *The God Delusion*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006. The “new atheist” classic comprehensive defense of atheism and undercutting of theism.

Fitzgerald, David. *The Mormons: The Complete Heretic's Guide to Western Religion (Book One)*. San Bernadino, CA: David Fitzgerald, 2013. Comprehensive and quite readable refutation of all things Mormon.

Flynn, Tom (Thomas W.). *The Trouble with Christmas*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1993. For anyone who honestly (but mistakenly) thinks that Jesus is the reason for the season, this one's for you.

Gaylor, Annie Laurie, ed. *Women without Superstition: “No Gods—No Masters”: The Collected Writings of Women Freethinkers of the Nineteenth & Twentieth Centuries*, Freedom From Religion Foundation, 1997. Proof that the allegedly fairer sex may indeed be fairer—as in more just—and smarter and better informed besides.

Grayling, A.C. *The GOD Argument: The Case Against Religion and for Humanism*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2013. Examines all the arguments for and against

religion and religious belief.

Harris, Sam. *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005. A “new atheist” classic.

Hitchens, Christopher. *god is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. New York: Twelve, 2007. Another “new atheist” classic.

Hume, David (Ernest C. Mossner, ed.). *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding; And Other Essays*. New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1963 [1748 ed. of Enquiry]. The classic set of essays on how we know what we know and related matters.**

Law, Stephen. *Believing Bullshit: How Not to Get Sucked into an Intellectual Black Hole*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2011. The title and subtitle say it all.

McGowan, Dale. *Atheism for Dummies*. Mississauga, ON: John Wiley & Sons Canada Ltd., 2013. Despite the series title, a book for intelligent people with real questions on atheism—one written with consistent graciousness and wit.*

Paine, Thomas (with preface by Stephen VanEck). *The Age of Reason, Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology: 200th Anniversary Edition*. Exton, PA: Wet Water Publications, 1992. The Enlightenment forerunner of much of modern atheism.**

Russell, Bertrand. *Why I Am Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*. New York: Touchstone/Simon & Schuster, 1957. The great philosopher-mathematician sums it up brilliantly.**

Sagan, Carl. *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*. New York: Random House, 1995. The brilliant exposition of the necessity and joy of being a skeptic and a scientist.

Smith, George H. *Atheism: The Case Against God*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1979. A logically comprehensive rebuttal to believing in any gods.

Stein, Gordon. *An Anthology of Atheism and Rationalism*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1980. A wide range of materials on the subjects.

Warraq, Ibn. *Why I Am Not a Muslim*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1995. Thorough analysis of why Islam should be rejected.

Wells, Steve, annotator. *The Skeptic's Annotated Bible: The King James Version from a Skeptic's Point of View*. Moscow, ID: SAB Books, LLC, 2012. Verse by verse, why the Bible doesn't stand up to scrutiny.

*Book that Ed Buckner had at least some connection to, as editor, advisor, or writer.

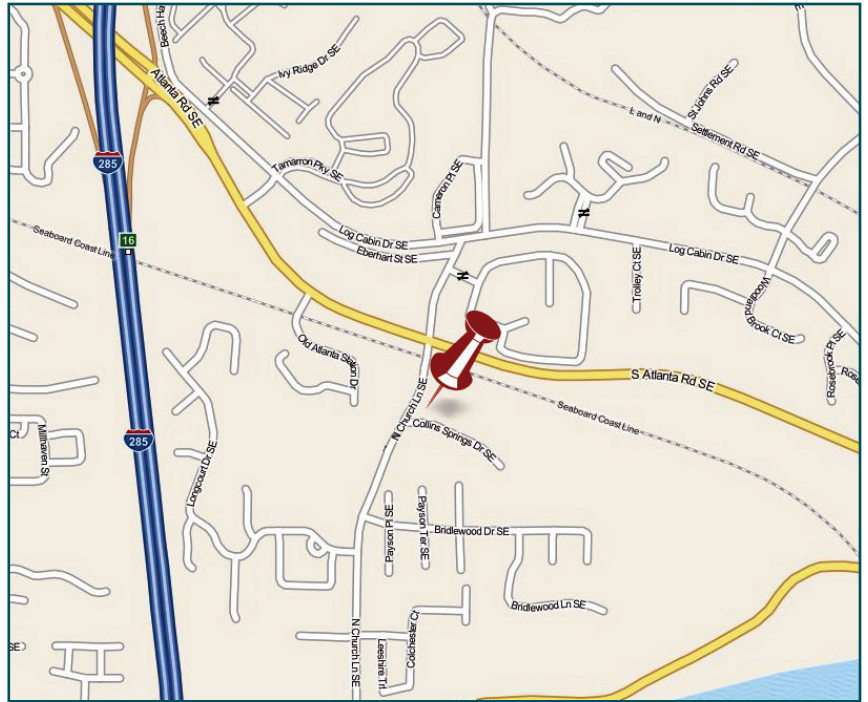
**Primary text is also available online in free electronic version (in the public domain).

*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



**AF Hall
4775 N. Church Lane SE
Atlanta, GA 30339**

Mark Banks
Jan. 12 1:00 pm Eastern
(At Hall and on Zoom)



Atlanta Freethought News is produced by the Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit, member-run, educational organization created to advance freethought and protect freethinkers. Any freethought, atheist, secular humanist, agnostic, or rationalist group is granted permission to reproduce anything from our newsletter not expressly labeled otherwise (acknowledgement of AFS and author appreciated). Articles published represent the official opinion of AFS only when that is clearly stated; all other opinion is that of the individual author.

NOTICE:
**If the roads are not passable on
Sunday, we will all stay home and
conduct the AFS meeting via Zoom!**

Atlanta Freethought News
Atlanta Freethought Society
4775 N Church Lane SE
Atlanta GA 30339

