



Can you imagine?

BY **BEN KEISER**

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John Lennon's song, *Imagine*, is one of the enduring classics from the 1970s. Lennon was a member of the Beatles and an avid political activist. "Imagine" is an anthem of secularism and remains extremely popular to this day. In fact, it practically sums up the secular worldview in three minutes.

Living for Today

*Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people living for today*

According to Jacques Berlinerblau, professor and director of the program for Jewish civilization at Georgetown University, "The secularists are here-and-now people. They live for this world, not the next."¹ Secularism is all about this world. In fact, this world is all there is—no heaven, no hell. Lennon asks us to imagine what the world would be like if we didn't have ideas like heaven and hell. According to Secularists, there would be a lot fewer wars and less hatred and if we all just lived for today, there could finally be peace.

¹ Jacques Berlinerblau, *How to Be Secular: A Call to Arms for Religious Freedom* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, Harcourt, 2012), 180 as quoted in Jeff Myers and David Noebel, *Understanding the Times: A Survey of Competing Worldviews*, 5th ed. (Manitou Springs, CO: Summit Ministries, 2015), 77.

God's world is not an evil place, it is a broken place that God is going to restore.

While Christians disagree with this view, we can admit that some Christians have been “so heavenly minded that they were no earthly good.” As Christians, we cannot deny the doctrines of heaven and hell, but we often get confused in how we think about those concepts.² We imagine heaven as the final destination where we will escape from the evil world. But Genesis 1-2 tells us that God created a good world of order and beauty. He created humans to live in relationship with him and set them about the task of bringing more of his goodness and beauty into the world. God's world is not an evil place, it is a broken place that God is going to restore.

Revelation 21-22 is a vision of heaven and earth finally uniting. God isn't going to discard the world; He's going to redeem and remake it. Our final hope is not in the clouds, but here in God's restored world, when heaven and earth are unified as the kingdom of God.

² Since Lennon's song is about a utopian vision, which is a kind of heaven, we will focus only on our ideas about heaven in this article. For an interesting discussion of Hell, see Tim Keller's *The Reason for God* and Jeff Myer's *Understanding the Faith*.

Living Life in Peace

Imagine there's no countries

It isn't hard to do

Nothing to kill or die for

And no religion too

Imagine all the people living life in peace

Secularism ultimately envisions a kind of utopia where humans, working together without the interference of God or religion, can create a world of peace and harmony. Lennon's vision sounds wonderful, but it is a denial of the sin nature in human beings. Since the fall in Genesis 3, all people have inherited a sin nature (Rom. 5:12), which means that left to our own devices we will look to our own interests.

The heaven we imagine (Scripture speaks of) will be God's kingdom is finally here, the world is living together in his just rule.

According to Francis Schaeffer, when Adam and Eve sinned, four separations occurred. Man was separated from God, from himself, from his neighbor, and from creation.³ The Bible and the history of the world affirm that we cannot repair these rifts on our own. The doctrine of sin isn't just about humans being imperfect beings who make mistakes; rather, it is about rebels going against their Creator, incapable of doing what is good on their own.

Part of Jesus' mission on earth was to initiate the kingdom of God, bringing peace and healing those separations caused by the fall. Though the kingdom of God will not be fully initiated until Christ returns, we can anticipate his arrival by working through the power of the Holy Spirit as Christ's ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20) to a lost and dying world.

³ Francis Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time* (1972) in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer A Christian Worldview: Volume 2 - A Christian View of the Bible as Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1982), 69-70.

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Sharing All the World

*Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people sharing all the world*

For Lennon and secularists, utopia will be people doing what feels good in a world with no religious rules or regulations, everyone living in peace and sharing everything. And we will get there only when we shed religion, personal possessions and outdated morality. If we are going to get to utopia, we all have to do it together. According to secularist Sam Harris, part of the problem with religion is that religious people identify "with a subset of humanity rather than with humanity as a whole."⁴

In reality however, Lennon, Harris, and other secularists have identified themselves with their own subset. Secularism is as much a religion as Christianity is. But Christianity (contra Harris and Lennon) is for the world. The heaven we imagine (and the one that Scripture speaks of) will be one in which God's kingdom is finally established and all the world is living together in harmony under his just rule.

However, we won't get there on our own merits. To be part of that kingdom we must be reconciled to God through his son, Jesus. When that relationship is restored, we are loosed upon the world to anticipate God's kingdom by bringing his justice and peace into our homes, communities, and indeed, the whole world. 

⁴ <http://www.beliefnet.com/faiths/secular-philosophies/why-religion-must-end-interview-with-sam-harris.aspx>.