

The Hiddenness of God

“Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself . . . ” (Psalm 10:1).

“Why do you hide your face?” (Psalm 44:24).

“Truly, you are a God who hides himself” (Isaiah 45:15).

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13).

The “hiddenness” of God isn’t new. God has always revealed Himself to a sufficient degree to create a desire to know Him and to love Him. His self-revelation is necessarily partial. If He were to directly fully reveal Himself to us, we’d be immediately annihilated by His glory. So, the created world, our conscience, the incarnate Son – these are some ways we can know of God’s existence. And God expects us not only to know of Him but to encounter Him in His Word.

But today’s brash atheists claim that the supposed “hiddenness” of God is really only to cover the fact that God doesn’t exist at all. The claim is absurd; yet God does deliberately, partially hide from us. There’s much here to discuss. So first, I will dispose of the atheist’s dishonest claim.

Atheists don’t really deny God’s existence. They can’t, because God is an invisible (to us) transcendent Being. Their problem is, they hate God. Pharaoh was permitted to see one miracle after another. God revealed Himself to Pharaoh as to no other. Yet Pharaoh only increasingly hardened his hatred of God. Richard Dawkins was once asked, What would convince you that God exists? He answered, “Nothing.” Atheism is not a “mind” problem, but a heart problem. Or a “will” problem. If God were to personally, directly reveal Himself to an atheist, the person would blow it off somehow. He’d say, for example, “I had a hallucination,” or make some other excuse so he could persist in his hatred of God.

Everyone has a God-given moral responsibility to know God and, to do that, to examine the evidence that God has provided—and then to act on that evidence, regardless what feelings they may have harbored. And in justice, God holds us accountable for our response to His (partial) self-revelation. The implications of this in either direction are compelling: infinite joy or infinite suffering. Only fools reject God’s love offer of Himself.

Humans have a deep-seated, all-controlling moral/spiritual problem. Sin. Our sin nature causes us to be proud and selfish, with an intense desire for autonomy. We want to be our own little god. Where did that come from? “God has bound all men over to disobedience [sin] so that he may have mercy on them all” (Romans 11:32). God placed all humanity under the control of sin so that, showing mercy, we—or certain ones, anyway—might respond with a heart of gratitude and love.

And God has implanted in us something that, for lack of a better term, we call conscience, which is how He and we communicate. The testimony of conscience is the most basic way we can know God. Our conscience is God communicating to us every day. And so when we observe in nature the starry sky, or the lovely butterflies in the fields, or ponder the mysteries of gravity or light, or reflect on the fine tuning of all the universes’s physical parameters, we understand that God is Creator. He is there. And He is not silent. He has given us a revelation in written form, His Word. It’s authoritative, because God cannot lie. And the greatest self-revelation of all is the incarnate Son. The Lord Jesus reveals God more fully than any other form of revelation. OK, the revelation is partial; it’s not full and direct. But it has to be that way.

God is not a force or a natural law. He is a Person. Transcendent and glorious, for sure, but a Person. And He made us in His image, as persons, so that we can be in a personal, even intimate, relationship with Himself. But it must be a loving relationship. Not a forced one, not a contractual one. And so God constituted a world in

which He reveals Himself sufficiently to create in us, as our response, a desire to know and to love Him. And to trust Him despite circumstances.

Yes, God seems distant and silent. We want Him close, we want to hear His voice, we want to know He's with us and for us. We have those assurances in His Word. But that's not what we want. We want Him to be physically here, working miracles for us. But that we cannot have, *for our sake*. Job didn't have what he wanted. Job had to remain faithful to a silent and invisible God in spite of suffering Satan's fierce onslaught and the taunts of his three so-called friends. Personal relationships have to be based on love and trust. So relationships need to be tested to demonstrate their genuineness, to prove the reality of them. "Why don't You make it clearer that You're there?" we often cry out. The answer is, "Meet Me in My Word." In the Word of God we encounter the living God. And the Holy Spirit witnesses to us thru that very Word. Such is the life of faith.

A life of faith is especially difficult (maybe even impossible) for today's young people who are bombarded with all manner of opinions, distractions and deceptions on social media, to which they are tragically addicted. They know of God (indeed they know of life itself) scant more than anguish and insecurity, and indifference to God results. They are probably incapable of responding to God's invitation to seek Him.

A greater issue is this: We in the Church don't want to know God either! We know about God, sure. Yet we can still be hard-hearted and resist Him. Our sin nature guarantees we'll do exactly that. That first generation of Israelites who departed Egypt for the Promised Land experienced the greatest miracle in the Bible. They walked thru the Red Sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. Yet they grumbled against the God who had just so miraculously delivered them, and then they refused to serve Him as He willed. We're no different. Don't we realize how wretched we are? We revel in God's love and ignore His transcendence, His fiery holiness, His justice. We therefore hold irrational (and wrong) expectations of how we think God should act in love. *That* we believe in God, we suppose, is all that matters, rather than *how* we believe in Him. We don't even care about how we're to believe in God. We never ask and never look into the Scriptures to know. That we might be resisting God never enters our minds.

True conversion has to consist of self-annihilation. It's why Jesus demanded that those who follow Him must deny themselves. That's because we still have a sin nature, and all humans therefore despise God and in pride seek to exalt themselves. Our minds and hearts are obstinately opposed to God and His will, even those of us who claim to be "born again." We aren't even aware what resistance to God is. We just do it. The Pharisees were supremely religious, yet they adamantly resisted God. Resistance to God has many expressions, and those who are "religious" probably find the most ways to express it. We have little to no self-awareness; we don't know our own hearts. We have no sense of how massive and controlling pride and lust for autonomy are.

That's why God is only partially revealed. It's why He "hides." We must humble ourselves to desire God and so to seek Him in order to know and to love Him. The hiddenness of God thus is deliberate. It is intended to draw out from us faith. Faith is so important to God because by it we are trusting in God's goodness, His wisdom, and His love.

This present world is filled to overflowing with evil, which in essence repudiates God's goodness, wisdom and love. Our trust in God, the essence of a personal relationship and an expression of love, rejects all that mass of evil. And the height of faith and love is imitating God. It's being godly, which, in this era of the Son, is Christ-likeness. If God is our great desire, we'll seek to know Him, and trust Him, and love Him, and be godly. For to love God is to want to be like Him. And that glorifies God, which comes close to the purpose for our existence. And gratitude for what God has done and will do for us should impel us to being obsessed with seeking Him.