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Does “Divine Hiddenness” Justify Atheism?

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How much knowledge do non-Christians have about God?

Introduction

Is God's existence obvious?

If so, then why are there other religions? And why are there atheists?

If not, then how can anyone be blamed for not believing in Him?

These are fair questions. But the person asking is assuming something, isn't he?

This question assumes that atheists and adherents of the world's religions of the world are attempting, in good faith, to try and get to God—that they would want to get to know God and worship God... if only He would reveal Himself to them.

According to this view, God (if He is there) is hidden. He is not obvious. And people really do not know Him. But is that really true?

Sometimes this objection is called the Problem of Divine Hiddenness.

As a Christian man, you're trying to base your answers to these questions on the Bible. So in this episode we're going to discuss what the Bible has to say about it.

About Me: My name is Joel Settecase, and my mission is to help YOU, the Christian layman, to build a legacy, where you, your kids and wife will be able to confidently articulate the answers to the questions the world is asking, from the Bible, and you will see Jesus change lives as you share your faith.

Why You Need To Be Able To Answer This Question ¹

Being able to answer this question of “Divine Hiddenness” will do a few things for you:

1. It will help you better understand the non-Christians in your life, as you seek to share

¹ If you're an atheist, an agnostic, or a skeptic yourself, then I hope you will read something here that makes you think. I want you to know that I say these things out of love, not hatred. I don't think I'm smarter or better than you. I'm probably worse. But I know the love of God, and I want you to know Him too, through Jesus Christ. And if your Christian friend sent you here, take that as an act of love too. We care about you.

your faith with them.

2. It will make you better able to pass on the Christian worldview to the younger generation, as you teach your children to better understand the world around them, through God's word.

Alright, so specifically, today I'm going to answer....

- Whom has God ACTUALLY revealed Himself to?
- What do these people know about God... and how do they ACTUALLY respond?
- How should knowing this affect how you defend your faith?

If you find this question thought provoking...

...and you want to feel more confident answering them, and the other stuff you need to know to better articulate and defend your faith, then I want to tell you about our free community.

It's *the* group where you can join together with 775 others on the same journey you're on, toward building a legacy for their families.

You'll get solid, answers to questions from the Bible, healthy conversation to sharpen your positions, and stuff to help grasp the tools of theology and philosophy in *practical terms*, so you can pass on the faith to the younger generation.

It's a fellowship of people, connected together to share ideas, skills, and practical help.

And I'll tell you more about the group and how to join at the end of this guide.

Alright now let's dive in.

If God is real, why are there atheists?

One question you will hear when you have discussions with non-Christians is this: If God is real, then why doesn't everyone believe in Him? Have you ever thought about this? If there is only one true God, and that God is the Creator of all mankind, then why has mankind created so many different religions—many of which claim to worship *other* Gods than the one true God? It would seem that God is hidden, and that His existence is not obvious. But if the Lord alone is God, then why would His existence be obvious?

Why would so many of His creatures—human beings—get it *wrong* when they try to describe Him and worship Him?

These are fair questions. And yet, they assume something, don't they? What do they assume? They assume that all the religions of the world are expressions of man's honest attempts to try and get to God, to know God, and to worship God.

Is that really true? Last chapter, we learned that our apologetics must begin with the Bible. So what does the Bible say?

Has God Revealed Himself To Everyone?

The Bible teaches that God's existence *is* obvious to everyone. In fact, not only His existence but also His nature—what He is like—is clear to all. As a result, people *do* know God, but they suppress (hold down) that knowledge of God. Yes, this includes non-Christians.

Now, someone might object to this and say, "Hey! You can't just appeal to the Bible. That's *your* book. Other people's books describe God differently and *don't* say that all people know *your* God. What if the Qur'an says 'all people know Allah.' Would you believe it?"

The answer to this objection is simple: not all so-called holy books are created equal. I would not believe the Qur'an if it said that.

Furthermore, I would not believe any other "holy book," if it said that all people know some other god. I am not obligated to believe any and every claim found in every "holy book" of every religion. I am a Christian. I believe the Bible. The Bible is my foundation for truth. The view of the world found in the Old and New Testaments—the Christian worldview—is the view that I hold.

As I hold to the biblical worldview, I find that the universe makes sense. The world turns out to be exactly as the Bible says it is.

On the other hand, non-Christian religions and worldviews *do not* describe the world as it is. Other religions do not correctly diagnose what is wrong with humanity. They do not adequately explain the basic realities of our experience like right and wrong (morality), truth and knowledge, and why life has meaning.

Other worldviews can not—and do not—tell the true story about beauty, purpose, and origins. We will discuss all this stuff in future chapters, but suffice it to say that I don't just follow the Bible because it's "my" book. I follow it because it is *true*. If you reject the Bible, you cannot make sense of anything else in life.

So if another religion were to claim that *its god* were the one that everyone knows, you and I would be no more obligated to believe it than we would a man on the street corner shouting that *he himself* were God.

The Bible is true. And the Bible says that God, our God, Yahweh, the Triune God of Scripture, is obvious. People know Him, and they suppress the truth about Him in unrighteousness. Now let's look at where the Bible says this.

I encourage you to get out your Bible right now and turn to Romans 1:18–22. In this passage written by the Apostle Paul, you will read:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, both His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools.... (Romans 1:18–22, LSB).

Notice what it says: men suppress the truth in unrighteousness (verse 18). What can be known about God is evident within them (verse 19). God's eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen and are understood through God's creation (verse 20). Men have no excuse (verse 20). Although people knew God, they did not respond to Him with worship or gratitude (verse 21). As a result, they showed themselves to be fools with worthless thoughts and darkened hearts (verse 22).

This is God's own explanation for why there are so many religions in the world. Why are there so many false systems of worship? Why so many worldviews that fail to tell the truth? It is because of unrighteousness.

In our natural condition, we love sin more than we love God. So we hold down, hold back, and deny the knowledge of God.

What Do People Know About God?

Let's take a closer look at this passage. What does it say has been clearly seen? The answer is God's "invisible attributes." If you want to know what those are, Paul tells you it is God's "eternal power and divine nature."

What is God's eternal power?

It is what He can do. It is the strength and ability that He has always had, for all eternity. It is the power to create worlds, stars, and galaxies from nothing. It is His direction of history. It is His ability to keep the human heart beating.

What is God's divine nature?

It is what He is like. It is His goodness, wisdom, and faithfulness. It is even the fact that God is Triune—one God eternally existing in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.²

How Are God's Attributes Seen?

So Scripture is clear that God's power and nature are clearly seen in His creation. How do we see these characteristics? In Romans 1, Paul calls them "invisible." How can something that is invisible be "clearly seen?"

You can see these attributes by observing what God has made. The invisible is seen by its effect on the things that are visible.

As an example of this, think about the wind. No one can see the wind. However, you can see the effects of the wind on trees, or in extreme cases, even on buildings. The invisible wind is seen by its effect on visible things.

In a similar way, God's power and nature are seen "through what has been made." They are observed through the creation. This includes the world around us, and it also includes ourselves. We too are part of God's creation. So there are things that can be known about God by looking at your own mind, heart, and conscience.

I will give you a few examples, and I encourage you to think of some of your own.

- We can see God's power by observing the orbits of the planets.
- We can see God's nature in the laws of science, which remain consistent from day to day.
- We can see God's nature in the pain we feel in our conscience when we tell a lie to our parents.
- We can see God's nature in the way societies create laws to govern themselves and execute justice.

What Is God Like?

He is almighty and has everlasting power. Think about His nature. He is true, good, beautiful, just (fair), faithful, merciful, gracious, wrathful (over sin), and intelligent. He provides for us. He knows everything. He knows the future. He is grand. He is glorious. These characteristics are revealed in creation. What other examples of God's power and nature can you think of?

² This truth, that God is both *one* and *many* (three) within Himself, helps us make sense of both the unity and diversity in the world. The oneness of the Creator explains why we can categorize things (e.g. we speak of mankind or humanity), and the diversity of God—and the uniqueness of each of the three divine Persons— explains why we can talk about individual entities (e.g. you and I are individuals).

All this knowledge is available to people, and yet people suppress the truth. Deep down, we all know that God is good. A good God must punish sin. This is a terrifying thought for a sinful person who loves to sin. So, in his natural condition, a person will try to keep God away from him. He will ignore God. He will do everything to explain away the knowledge of God that is so apparent, all around him.

This is a way of coping with the perfect goodness of God and the sin which we know we are guilty of committing.

A Pool Full of Ping-Pong Balls

You can think of all the facts people have about God as being like ping-pong balls floating on the surface of a pool.

The unbeliever who wants to suppress the knowledge of God can hold a few of them down at a time, but the other ones stay afloat. When he loses hold of one, it pops up to the surface.

This is why some people who deny Christianity are vehemently pro-animal rights, or pro-art, pro-environment, or pro-social justice. They suppress certain facts about God, but they cannot deny His perfect standard of goodness, or beauty, or justice perfectly. Their zeal for those things is their way of making up for the truths that they deny. Think of ping-pong balls popping up to the surface of the pool and out of the water. Pop!

Although people suppress the knowledge of God, it is impossible to do this perfectly or completely. The truth of God is inescapable!

How Should All This Affect Your Apologetics?

Did you know that there are accounts of Jesus and the apostles engaging in apologetics in the Bible? Over and over again, we see them defending the truth of the Christian message.

And in these accounts, we see them dealing with unbelievers as though they are *morally responsible for suppressing the truth about God*. Those who deny the truth about the one true God are not innocent. They are not innocent, because God is not hidden. They are not “doing their best” to get to God. In their heart of hearts, they know God.

Now this does *not* mean we call our non-Christian friends liars. Hear me very clearly: you should not shout at your non-Christian friends, “You *do* know God! Admit it! You sinner!” This is

not the example you will see in Scripture. And it does not follow Peter's instruction to give your defense with "gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:16).

Instead, here is how you should use what you now know. Always remember that the person to whom you are speaking is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). As he is denying God or the Christian message, he is "suppressing the truth in unrighteousness." Your job as a Christian and an apologist is to find ways to uncover how he is suppressing the truth. You must bring to light the inconsistency between what the non-Christian *says* he believes and what he *actually* knows to be true.

This isn't easy. It requires a lot of listening. When you are dealing with truth suppression, you are dealing with hearts and minds, not just surface-level arguments (Romans 1:21). Later in this book, you will learn how to respond to some specific challenges.

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Thanks for listening to Worldview Legacy. Thank you to my high school apologetics students, (they were the first guinea pigs for this talk). This episode was produced by Yours Truly, Joel Settecase, and is a production of the Think Institute.

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Review Questions:

1. What do unbelievers know about God?
2. What are some of the things that have been made that reveal knowledge about God?
3. What do you think are some ways that unbelievers might show that they really do know God?
4. If everyone knows God, why do you think many people call themselves "atheists"—meaning someone who does *not* believe in God?