

Tough question: If God is Real, Why Doesn't He Show Up and Prove It?

This is Tim Perry, Christ Community Church, with *Tough Questions*. I wanted to show you this article as we get started with this week's *Tough Question*. It's on a website called ExChristian.net – an article here posted by Galen Rose last Thursday about this time, and the article is called *The Hiddenness of God*. It's got a really cute little cartoon on there – "I've found God!" Kind of like everybody is out there looking for God and God just needs to show up – making himself known to us.

Well, here's how Galen starts out his article: *"According to Christian theology, an invisible god created the universe and sustains and rules it today, making this god the most powerful force in the universe. But, why then is he so hidden from us? We know of many lesser invisible things, such as gravity, electrons, and magnetism, which we have discovered, measured, and described by their effects on visible things, but such evidences of a god are highly ambiguous at best."*

And I'm going to ask the question this week, if God is real – why doesn't he show up more often and prove it to all of us? It's a question I bet you've asked yourself. As we've been reading our Project 4:4 material, we've come across lots of examples of God showing up this week.

Let's look at them over on the board together for a minute. Well there's lots of God sightings this week in your Project 4:4 reading. It turns out God is showing up all over the place in the Old Testament.

On the 28th of January, you read about how Moses and seventy elders of the Israelites went up to the mountain and they had a retreat, if you will, with God, and they were impressed because they got to see the very feet of God resting on this pavement of sapphire.

Well, on the 31st, we read about how Moses encounters God in this little structure called the Tent of Meeting. It's like a little tent that Moses pitched outside of the encampment of the Israelites. It's where Moses could go and talk with God face to face, sort of, kind of like how people would converse but God would show up and would show his glory to Moses inside the Tent of Meeting.

On the 31st, you also read about how Moses gets so frustrated with the people of Israel because they've lapsed into idolatry and he goes to God and says, "God, you have to promise that somehow you're going to be with us because we're going to make mistakes." And God says, "OK, Moses, I'll show you my glory." And he reveals his divine attributes to Moses in a way that Moses now knows God is going to be with them and show mercy to them.

The glory shows up in this structure that they build called the Tabernacle. Instead of just having a Tent of Meeting for Moses and God to fellowship with each other, they build a structure for the entire Israel community to be able to meet God and to know that God is with them and God would show up in the Tabernacle. After all of

the priests are ordained and the Tabernacle was completed, then the people are able to see that God's glory is with them when the cloud descends over the Tabernacle.

Well, there's one last bizarre story, on the 3rd of February that you'll read about. It has to do with Aaron's two sons, Nadab and Abihu. They go into the Tabernacle and they offer some "unauthorized" sacrifice – some "unauthorized" fire. As it turns out the fire of God's glory comes out of the temple and consumes them in an act of divine judgment. So if we're not careful, God's glory can actually be fatal.

Well, we keep using this word – "glory" to describe a God appearance. Well it's this word in Hebrew – we pronounce that word "Kavod" in our language. So Kavod is God's glory. A few other words that help us understand this would be our word "abundance". All of who God is can be encompassed in that word "glory". Maybe splendor is another really good word for us in our language. That not only is it God's attributes, but it's some kind of visual representation of it that reflects God's beauty and his splendor. The word "honor" is also even associated with the word "Kavod" – because in addition to all of God's attributes is the response on the part of a worshiper that we ought to honor God because this is a vast, awesome, tremendous God.

Well one of the things that's a powerful common denominator in all of these experiences of encountering God and encountering God's glory, is that it all happens on God's terms – not ours. So when we ask the question – if God is real – why doesn't he just show up and prove it? - we're actually asking for something pretty bold. Every time people try to force God to show up on their terms, it never worked out very well in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament, we had a God who was willing to show up and the same is true in the New Testament. When Jesus shows up as God Incarnate, he shows us what God would be like if he actually came and was with us and walked among us. How God would use power, how God would display love, acceptance and how God would offer himself as a solution to mankind's problems.

Well, it's coming down the pipe that you'll get to read about how God continues to make himself known and how God reveals his glory. Jesus leaves the earth after his death and resurrection, and it's then his Holy Spirit that becomes the agent of God's presence among God's people. On December 4th, you'll get to read this passage where Paul writes the following to the Corinthians:

"We are not like Moses who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. But their minds were made dull for to this day, the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed because only in Christ is the veil taken away. Even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. But when anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being

transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."

So it's the third person of the trinity now who gives to us the presence of God and shows and reveals who God is to us. We look backwards to the record of the New Testament to see what Jesus said and did, but now we experience the presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

Well, there are a few conclusions that I think we can come to based on everything that we've looked at. First of all, when it comes to whether or not God will show up and prove himself to us, it's God's choice as to how He appears. It was true in the Old Testament and it was true in the New Testament, and we shouldn't expect God to automatically show up when and where we want him to. He's on his own timetable. He has his own purposes.

Second of all, there's ample evidence to show that God does exist if we just want to interpret that evidence in the right way. So when we're asking the question, "Well when is God going to show up and prove himself?" – he already has! If we look at the things that he's created, there's lots of evidence to draw on – to show us what God is like. If we look at the pages of scripture and really do our homework to see if scripture does hold water and is historically reliable like it's claimed to be – then we'll begin to see ample evidence for the reality of God. And then, of course, we can look at the person of Jesus.

Well the third thing, is that we never get God to show up on our terms. Any time and every time that's been attempted, it's been a failed project. It's up to God – not us. We can't just say, "God, make yourself appear this way and then we'll believe." It's up to God. And God's presence now is felt, experienced, is mediated to us through the Holy Spirit.

There was a famous philosopher named Bertrand Russell and you might have heard of him before. Bertrand Russell was an atheist, an agnostic – and people asked him one day, "Lord Russell, what will you do if you die and are brought face to face to God some day. What are you going to say to him? What's going to happen if you were wrong about what you were so sure about?" And Russell said in return, "I shall say, "God, why did you make the evidence for your existence so insufficient?" We read that and we see that, of course, that drips with all kinds of self-important pride.

So on the question of why doesn't God show up today? Well, the simple answer is that he already has. And it's our job to sort through the evidence of Him showing up – what did he say, what did he do – as we read through scripture. And if God has in fact shown up, then we can be participants in his presence. We come to him and if through Jesus the veil is removed from our eyes, we clearly see evidence of God's presence all around us.

Well, if you disagree with this, I'd invite your comments – so hit the button down there and let's dialogue about it.

Thanks for spending a few minutes with me. Have a great day!