Christianity in the Crosshairs: Answering the 10 Objections Skeptics Raise Most Often

Investigation No. 2: If God Exists, Why Doesn't He Make Himself Obvious?

The God Who Seems Silent: A Historical, Scientific, Philosophical, and Biblical Investigation into Divine Hiddenness, Honest Doubt, and the Evidence That Heaven Has Not Been Silent

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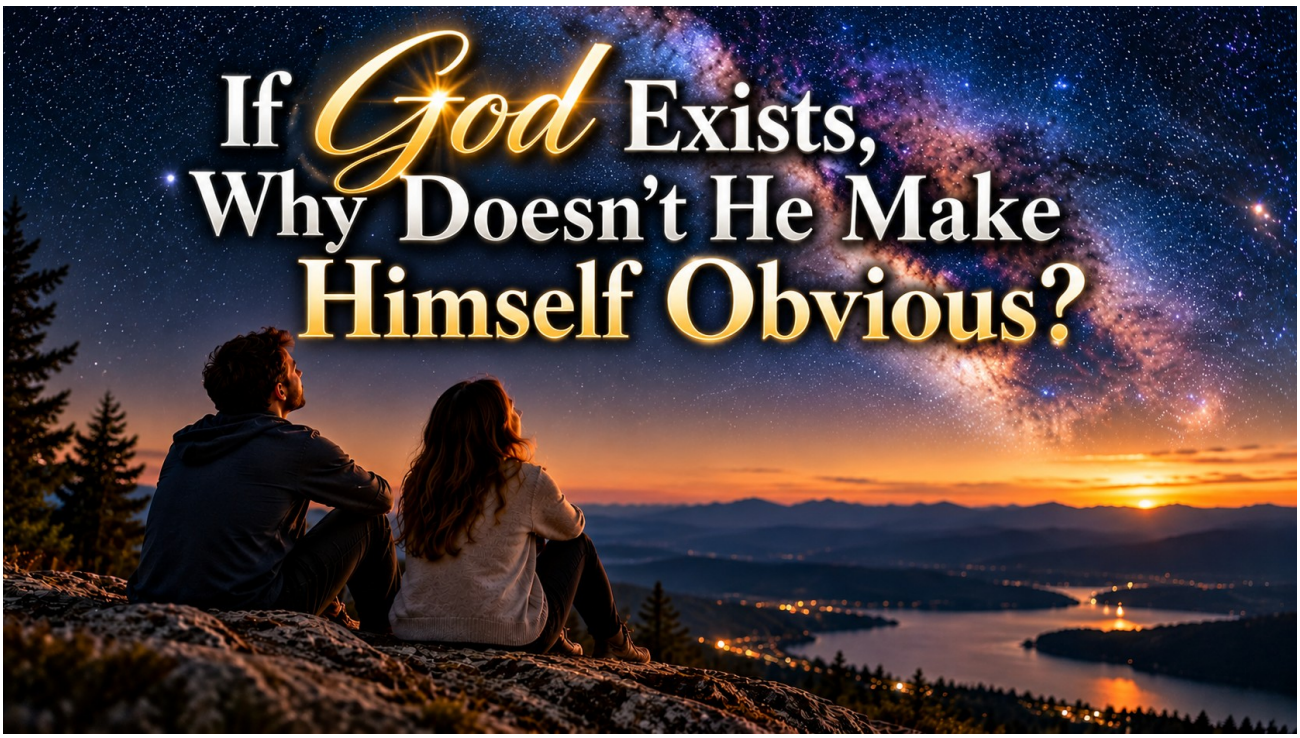


The Question

“If God exists and desires to be known, why does He remain so apparently hidden? Why doesn't He make His existence unmistakably clear?”

Table of Contents

A Startling Paradox: As American Religious Affiliation Declines, 70 Million Questions About God and Religion Flood ChatGPT EVERY WEEK! 3
If Hundreds of Millions Are Searching for God, Why Do So Many Still Struggle to Find Him? Is He hiding from them? 7
The Question We Raised in Our Previous Investigation 10
What Do We Mean When We Say That God Is Hidden? 11
The Strongest Modern Objection: Dr. J. L. Schellenberg and Nonresistant Nonbelief 13
Are All Atheists Secretly Resisting God? 14
The Ancient Problem: When Scripture Itself Asks Why God Is Silent 16
From Augustine to Aquinas: Has God Been Speaking Through Creation All Along? 18
Blaise Pascal: Why Might God Provide Light Without Overwhelming Certainty? 20
Why Doesn't God Simply Appear to Everyone? 21
Why Doesn’t God Provide Exhaustive Evidence? The Difference Between Believing God Exists and Choosing to Love Him 22
Has God Already Revealed Himself Through the Universe? 24
The Extraordinary Fine-Tuning of the Universe: Evidence of Design or an Unanswered Scientific Question? 26
What About Consciousness, Reason, and the Moral Law? 27
Does the Bible Claim That God Has Made Himself Known to Everyone? 28
Are We Expecting God to Reveal Himself in a Way He Never Promised or Would Run Contrary to His Nature? 29
Why Did God Reveal Himself Dramatically in Biblical Times but Not Today? 31
Thomas the Doubter: Did Jesus Condemn a Man for Asking for Evidence? 33
What If God Himself Stepped into Human History to Reveal Who He Is? 35
The Resurrection: Was God's Greatest Revelation an Event in History? 38
Why Would God Reveal Himself Through One Man in One Place at One Time? 40
Religious Geography: Why Does Birthplace Influence What People Believe? 42
What About People Who Never Hear the Name of Jesus? 44
Could Temporary Hiddenness Serve Purposes We Do Not Yet Understand? 44
Why Do Some People Experience God Profoundly While Others Experience Nothing? 45
When God's Silence Follows Religious Abuse, Betrayal, or Disillusionment 46
What If You Have Prayed for Years and Heard Nothing? 47
Is Faith Believing Without Evidence? 48
Can Honest Doubt Become Part of a Serious Search for God? 49
Would a Perfectly Loving God Allow Someone to Die Without Believing? 50
Five Objections Christians Must Not Avoid 51
What Would Actually Count as Evidence That God Exists? 52
The Evidence Before Us: What Does Divine Hiddenness Actually Establish? 53
A Former Atheist's Reflection: What Changed My Mind? 55
The Verdict: Has God Truly Remained Silent? 56
The Second Coming: Will Divine Hiddenness Eventually End? 58
For the Person Who Still Cannot See God: An Invitation to Keep Investigating 59
Final Encouragement: The God Who Has Not Finished Speaking 60
🔥 LOOK! What's Coming NEXT TUESDAY in Your Tactical Tuesday Briefing! 61
Christianity in the Crosshairs — Investigation No. 3 61
Selected Scholarly References and Further Reading 62

A Startling Paradox: As American Religious Affiliation Declines, 70 Million Questions About God and Religion Flood ChatGPT EVERY WEEK!

In February 2025, the Pew Research Center released its sweeping *Religious Landscape Study*, drawing upon responses from 36,908 American adults surveyed between July 2023 and March 2024. The results revealed a remarkable paradox. Although **83 percent of Americans said they believe in God or a universal spirit, only 54 percent expressed absolute certainty in that belief.** Moreover, while 79 percent believed there is something spiritual beyond the observable natural world, the percentage of Americans expressing absolute certainty about God's existence had declined considerably since 2007. Even among Americans identifying as Christian, only 73 percent expressed absolute certainty that God exists, compared with 80 percent in 2007. (Pew Research Center, *Religious and Spiritual Beliefs*, February 26, 2025.)

The changing religious identity of the nation makes these findings even more revealing. In 2007, approximately 78 percent of American adults identified as Christian; by 2023–2024, that figure had fallen to just 62 percent. Meanwhile, the percentage identifying as religiously unaffiliated—including atheists, agnostics, and those claiming no particular religion—had risen from 16 percent to 29 percent. Although Pew found that the long-term decline in Christian identification has slowed and perhaps temporarily stabilized in recent years, the transformation over the preceding two decades remains substantial.

Americans are increasingly willing to distance themselves from organized religion, even while many continue believing in God, spirituality, the human soul, and the possibility of life beyond death. (Pew Research Center, *Decline of Christianity in the U.S. Has Slowed, May Have Leveled Off*, February 26, 2025.)

Even more revealing, Pew found that 56 percent of religiously unaffiliated Americans—including people who identify as atheists, agnostics, or having no particular religion—reported having thought at least some about God and religion in recent years. Such findings do not establish that these individuals secretly believe in God, nor that they are all actively seeking a personal relationship with Him. They do, however, demonstrate that questions about God's existence continue to occupy the minds of millions of people, including many who do not identify with organized religion. **Religious disaffiliation, in other words, does not necessarily mean the disappearance of spiritual curiosity.** (Pew Research Center, *Religious and Spiritual Beliefs*.)

But here is the startling paradox that should capture the attention of every Christian, pastor, apologist, and thoughtful skeptic: Even as millions of Americans have distanced themselves from traditional religious institutions, enormous numbers of people continue seeking answers about God, faith, morality, and life's ultimate meaning—often through entirely different channels. Instead of automatically bringing their questions to a pastor, church, or denominational authority, many are exploring religious subjects through independent podcasters, YouTube commentators, social media influencers, online scholars, religious websites, discussion forums, and increasingly sophisticated artificial intelligence systems. The modern seeker can privately investigate Christianity, atheism, Islam, biblical history, the supernatural, or the existence of God without ever entering a sanctuary or speaking personally with a minister. This transformation does not mean churches have become irrelevant, nor that every person using digital religious resources has abandoned organized religion. It does mean that religious questions are now being explored in a much larger and more decentralized marketplace of ideas, where traditional religious institutions no longer control how people first encounter or evaluate competing spiritual claims.

And the research confirms that this is far more than speculation. A June 2023 Pew Research Center report found that **30 percent of American adults searched online for information about religion**, while 20 percent watched religion-focused videos on platforms such as YouTube or TikTok and 15 percent listened to religious podcasts. More recently, a March 2026 Pew investigation into religious audio programming found that 70 percent of Americans who listen to such programming use podcasts or online streaming platforms at least occasionally, rising to an astonishing **87 percent among**

listeners ages 18–29. These statistics measure different activities and populations, but together they illustrate how digital platforms have become important sources of religious information, discussion, and instruction. A person struggling with doubts about God may encounter a podcast debate before hearing a Sunday sermon, investigate biblical archaeology through YouTube, compare theological arguments through an online article, or seek an immediate explanation from an AI chatbot. And because these platforms feature both serious scholars and poorly informed commentators, the demand for credible, well-documented, intellectually responsible Christian resources has become especially important. (Pew Research Center, *Use of Apps and Websites in Religious Life*, June 2, 2023; Pew Research Center, *Americans' Experiences With Religious Audio Programming*, March 26, 2026.)

Then came another extraordinary revelation, one that may help explain where increasing numbers of people are taking their religious questions. On October 20, 2026, *The Christian Post* reported findings from an OpenAI analysis covering September 2025 through September 2026: **approximately 70 million religion-related requests are submitted to ChatGPT every single week worldwide!** Of those requests, approximately 45 percent concern Islam and 34 percent concern Christianity—representing an estimated **23.8 million Christianity-related requests every week**. The analysis also found approximately 22 million weekly requests concerning the study of religious texts and another 16 million concerning religious practices and holidays. These numbers represent requests rather than unique individuals, and they include people studying and practicing their existing faiths as well as those examining unfamiliar beliefs. Nevertheless, their magnitude reveals something extraordinary about the modern world: even as conventional patterns of religious affiliation change, digital technology has become an important new setting for questions about God, sacred writings, religious traditions, and humanity's ultimate purpose. (Leonardo Blair, *ChatGPT Gets 70M Requests About Religion Weekly; Most Are About Islam, Followed by Christianity*, *The Christian Post*, October 20, 2026; OpenAI, *70M Prompts About Faith*, October 8, 2026.)

Think about the implications of this dramatic shift. **The desire to investigate spiritual questions has certainly not vanished simply because millions of people no longer identify with traditional religious institutions. Instead, those questions are increasingly appearing on computer screens, smartphones, podcast platforms, and artificial intelligence systems.** A young adult who has not attended church in years may spend an evening listening to a debate about God's existence. A lifelong agnostic may privately investigate the historical evidence for Jesus' Resurrection without revealing those questions to friends or family. An atheist may challenge the apparent contradictions

between Christianity and science, while a discouraged believer may seek answers about suffering, unanswered prayer, or the apparent silence of Heaven. Not all of these inquiries lead toward Christian faith, and many originate with people already committed to other religions. Nevertheless, their extraordinary volume reveals an immense opportunity for ministries willing to enter these intellectual conversations with historical accuracy, philosophical seriousness, scientific literacy, and a genuine respect for those asking difficult questions.

And this is precisely where the mission of CrossFireUSA becomes especially significant. As someone raised in an atheist and agnostic household before spending decades investigating Christianity's historical, scientific, philosophical, and theological claims, I founded CrossFireUSA to help people examine the most difficult questions concerning faith, history, science, morality, and the existence of God. Since launching in May 2025, our nonprofit educational thinktank (www.CrossFireUSA.org) has now served approximately **112,000 guests**, including thousands of atheists and an even larger number of agnostics, according to our ministry's latest reported outreach figures. GoDaddy also notified us that CrossFireUSA's website traffic placed it among the **top 5 percent of Faith & Religion websites on its platform within the referenced three-year group**—a remarkable distinction for such a young educational ministry. These figures are especially meaningful because our purpose has never been simply to attract visitors, but to provide serious, accessible, carefully researched answers for people investigating the deepest questions of human existence. (CrossFireUSA, *About Chaplain Todd DuBord and the Mission of CrossFireUSA*)

The connection between these developments is difficult to overlook. Millions of Americans remain uncertain about God's existence, nearly three in ten American adults claim no religious affiliation, and tens of millions of religion-related questions are being directed to artificial intelligence every week across the world. At the same time, people can encounter more competing religious and philosophical claims before breakfast than previous generations might have encountered in years of ordinary conversation. CrossFireUSA stands at the intersection of these developments, offering detailed investigations into questions that skeptics, seekers, and believers have wrestled with for centuries. Why does God permit innocent suffering? If He exists, why does He not reveal Himself unmistakably? Can the Bible be trusted historically? Do science and Christianity ultimately conflict? Was Jesus Christ who He claimed to be, and is there credible evidence for His Resurrection? **These are not merely abstract questions debated in university classrooms or theological seminaries; they are precisely the kinds of questions that contemporary people are bringing to search engines, podcasts, AI**

systems, religious websites, and private conversations as they attempt to make sense of their lives and the universe. Our mission is to meet those questions with historical documentation, serious scholarship, biblical investigation, compassion, and a determination to follow evidence wherever it leads.

There is another profound responsibility accompanying this digital transformation: **The ease of finding an answer must never be confused with the certainty that the answer is true.** Artificial intelligence can generate convincing explanations, popular podcasters can influence millions, and online commentators can speak with extraordinary confidence while presenting incomplete or inaccurate information. For questions involving God's existence, biblical reliability, and eternal destiny, intellectual integrity demands something more than persuasive presentation. It requires examining original sources, weighing competing arguments, and distinguishing historical evidence from speculation. That commitment to independently verifiable truth is foundational to CrossFireUSA's mission.

If Hundreds of Millions Are Searching for God, Why Do So Many Still Struggle to Find Him? Is He hiding from them?

But behind these extraordinary statistics are real people wrestling with deeply personal questions. In a nation possessing extraordinary scientific instruments, unprecedented access to information, immense religious freedom, and virtually unlimited opportunities to examine competing worldviews, millions remain uncertain about one of humanity's

most consequential questions: Is there actually a God who created us, knows us, loves us, and desires a relationship with us? If such a God exists, why does His reality remain uncertain to so many intelligent, sincere, thoughtful people? And why, in an era when information about nearly every imaginable subject is available within seconds, does the existence of the One Christians proclaim as the Creator of everything remain a subject of such profound disagreement?

The question becomes even more personal when we consider the individual who has earnestly sought God but found no convincing response. Imagine someone who has spent years reading religious writings, attending churches, examining arguments for God's existence, and praying privately for some recognizable indication that God is listening. Perhaps that individual has whispered, “God, if You really exist, I want to know You. Please help me believe.” Yet months or years pass without the unmistakable experience the person hoped would arrive. The individual may eventually conclude not that God has been disproved, but that belief cannot honestly be sustained. Such a person may continue longing for answers while wondering whether anyone beyond the physical universe is actually listening.

What should Christians say to such a person? Should we accuse the individual of secretly loving sin, refusing the evidence, or deliberately running from God? Should we suggest that a loving Creator has spoken clearly enough and that every remaining doubt must therefore be rebellion? Or should we first acknowledge that an apparently sincere search ending in unbelief presents a genuine philosophical and theological difficulty, one that deserves serious consideration? The problem becomes particularly challenging when we remember that Christianity describes God not merely as a distant supernatural intelligence, but as a perfectly loving Father who desires people to know Him. If that is true, why should anyone genuinely willing to enter such a relationship remain uncertain that He exists?

There is also an important distinction between **those who are indifferent to God's existence and those who desperately wish they could believe but remain intellectually unconvinced.** For the latter, uncertainty may be accompanied by a profound longing for meaning, ultimate justice, reunion with deceased loved ones, and assurance that their lives possess eternal significance. Such individuals are not necessarily rejecting the possibility of divine love; they may be grieving the apparent absence of the very God they hope exists. Their experience raises an especially difficult question: **If a loving earthly parent would ordinarily respond to a child sincerely searching for reassurance of that parent's presence, what should we expect from a perfectly loving Heavenly Father?** This comparison does not establish that God must

reveal Himself in precisely the manner we desire, but it brings the philosophical problem of divine hiddenness into sharper personal and relational focus.

I believe the latter approach is both intellectually responsible and consistent with the biblical invitation to examine evidence carefully. As someone raised in an atheist and agnostic household who eventually became convinced of Christianity's truth claims through years of investigation, I understand something of the questions that arise when inherited assumptions give way to serious intellectual inquiry. My own journey was not an instantaneous movement from disbelief to certainty. It involved examining scientific arguments, religious traditions, philosophical questions, historical documents, and the identity and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. That experience has left me deeply persuaded that Christianity can withstand careful investigation, but also convinced that dismissing every skeptical question as intellectual dishonesty does a disservice to truth.

Indeed, this conviction is what makes the growing work of CrossFireUSA so personally important to me. Having traveled the intellectual road from atheism and agnosticism to Christian faith, I recognize that people do not all begin their search for truth from the same place. Some are lifelong Christians troubled by unanswered questions; others have abandoned organized religion while remaining spiritually curious; still others are convinced atheists who challenge Christianity's claims on historical, scientific, or philosophical grounds. Whatever their background, I believe they deserve substantial answers rather than slogans, reliable evidence rather than unsupported assertions, and thoughtful engagement rather than condemnation. **If millions are turning to artificial intelligence, podcasts, social media, and online resources to explore religious questions, our responsibility is to make credible scholarship and the case for Christianity accessible wherever those questions are being asked.** The growing digital search for spiritual understanding is not merely a technological development; it represents an extraordinary opportunity to engage people who may never attend a church service, read a traditional theological textbook, or seek counsel from a pastor.

Our present investigation concerns perhaps the most personal objection of all. If there is a perfectly loving God who wants human beings to know Him, why does He not make His existence as obvious as the sun rising each morning? Why does humanity disagree so profoundly about Him, and why have countless people lived and died without an unmistakable personal encounter with the God Christians proclaim? These questions will take us through the arguments of contemporary philosophers, the testimony of ancient Scripture, the reasoning of influential Christian thinkers, the evidence offered by the natural world, and the historical claims concerning Jesus of Nazareth. We will discover that divine hiddenness is not simply a complaint that God has failed to perform an

impressive miracle. At its heart lies a deeper question concerning the nature of divine love itself: **Would a perfectly loving God ever permit a person who genuinely desires to know Him to remain unable to believe that He exists?**

The Question We Raised in Our Previous Investigation

In our preceding investigation, *If God Is Good, Why Is There So Much Evil and Innocent Suffering?*, we considered why an all-powerful and perfectly loving God might permit devastating suffering, natural disasters, human cruelty, disease, and apparently unanswered prayers. We examined the biblical testimony of Job, the philosophical problem of evil, the limitations of human understanding, the significance of freedom and natural laws, and Christianity's promise that evil and death will ultimately be defeated. Throughout that investigation, another question repeatedly emerged: Even if God possesses morally sufficient reasons for temporarily permitting suffering, why does He so often appear silent while people endure it?

On pages 50–51 of that earlier study, we briefly introduced the philosophical problem of divine hiddenness and the work of Canadian philosopher Dr. J. L. Schellenberg. We also noted a critical weakness in one frequently offered Christian response: the suggestion that overwhelming evidence of God's existence would necessarily eliminate human freedom. Knowing that someone exists does not force us to love that person. Biblical narratives themselves describe people who encountered extraordinary manifestations of divine power and nevertheless resisted God's purposes. Consequently, the claim that God must

remain hidden to preserve human freedom cannot adequately answer the objection without additional reasoning.

Our earlier study also distinguished the absence of divine intervention in a particular tragedy from the broader historical question of whether God has ever intervened in human affairs. The fact that a desperate prayer appears unanswered does not, by itself, establish that God does not exist. Neither, however, does one reported miracle eliminate the difficult questions of those who have prayed with equal sincerity and experienced no recognizable response. Divine hiddenness therefore deserves an investigation of its own—one that takes seriously both the skeptical challenge and Christianity's remarkable claim that God has already revealed Himself in creation, conscience, Scripture, history, and, most decisively, the person of Jesus Christ.

What Do We Mean When We Say That God Is Hidden?

Philosophers use the term *divine hiddenness* to describe several related difficulties. Sometimes it refers to the absence of a direct sensory experience of God. Sometimes it refers to ambiguity in the available evidence for God's existence. In other cases, it concerns the painful experience of praying without receiving a recognizable response, or the existence of sincere people who would welcome a relationship with God if they believed He existed but cannot honestly reach that conviction. These are related problems, but each requires careful analysis.

It is important to distinguish hiddenness from nonexistence. Something may exist without being immediately visible, audible, or accessible to the human senses. Much of what scientists investigate cannot be observed directly without instruments, measurements, calculations, or inferences from observable effects. Yet this observation must not be exaggerated. Scientists develop testable models and predictions that allow others to evaluate their conclusions; merely stating that God is invisible does not place every theological claim on the same evidential footing as an established scientific theory.

Divine hiddenness becomes especially challenging because Christianity describes God not merely as an invisible cause of the universe, but as a personal being who loves human beings and invites them into relationship. An impersonal force might reasonably remain indifferent to whether anyone knows it exists. A perfectly loving personal God, however, appears to have a reason to make Himself knowable. Here the skeptical philosopher presses the matter: If God desires fellowship with people, why does He not ensure that sincere, receptive persons possess at least enough knowledge of His existence to decide whether they wish to know Him? (Stanford Ency. of Philosophy, Hiddenness of God)

Another important consideration is that **the perception of God's hiddenness may depend partly upon what a person expects divine communication to look like.** Some anticipate an audible voice, unmistakable miracle, or overwhelming spiritual encounter, while others seek intellectually persuasive evidence. These differing expectations raise an important question: **Could God be communicating in ways that do not correspond to the particular form of revelation someone expects?**

Dr. J. L. Schellenberg (born 1959) who helped establish divine hiddenness as a major subject in contemporary philosophy of religion, captures the heart of this objection with a remarkably simple observation: **“One clearly cannot even get started in a personal relationship without believing that the other party exists.”** His point is that a perfectly loving God would presumably make conscious relationship possible for every person genuinely willing to enter one. If someone sincerely desires to know God but remains unconvinced that He exists, the difficulty involves more than insufficient evidence; it raises a fundamental question about divine love and accessibility. Yet the Christian response must also investigate whether God's revelation through creation, conscience, history, and Jesus Christ provides reasonable grounds for belief, even when His presence is not immediately perceived. (Dr. J. L. Schellenberg, quoted in Dr. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Dr. Adam Green, *Hiddenness of God*, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, section 2, “The Argument from Nonresistant Nonbelief.”)

The Strongest Modern Objection: Dr. J. L. Schellenberg and Nonresistant Nonbelief

In 1993, Dr. Schellenberg published *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, a landmark work that helped establish divine hiddenness as a major subject within contemporary philosophy of religion. His argument has subsequently appeared in refined forms in numerous books, articles, and debates. Unlike some popular skeptical objections that simply demand a spectacular supernatural demonstration, Schellenberg focuses on a more difficult question concerning the relationship between perfect divine love and human nonbelief.

His reasoning begins with a proposition that many Christians affirm: God, if He exists as traditionally understood, is perfectly loving. A perfectly loving God would presumably be open to a personal relationship with finite persons capable of participating in that relationship. Such a relationship cannot be consciously entered unless the person believes that God exists. Yet Schellenberg argues that there are people who do not believe in God, are capable of relationship with Him, and are not resisting that relationship. Their unbelief therefore appears incompatible with the existence of a perfectly loving God.

The argument may be summarized as follows. First, if a perfectly loving God exists, He would remain open to a conscious personal relationship with every capable person who does not resist it. Second, such a person cannot consciously enter that relationship without believing God exists. Third, if the perfectly loving God exists, capable and

nonresistant people should not remain in unbelief. Fourth, some such people do remain unbelievers. Therefore, if those premises are sound, no perfectly loving God exists. (Dr. J. L. Schellenberg, Divine Hiddenness: Part 1, *Philosophy Compass*, 2017)

This is not a trivial argument. Its force does not require proving that all atheists are morally admirable or that all doubters have perfectly assessed the evidence. It requires only some genuine cases of nonresistant nonbelief. The distinction between knowledge and love is crucial: a person may refuse friendship with someone whose existence is obvious, but cannot knowingly accept friendship with someone whose existence the person sincerely doubts. Christians must therefore offer more than the assertion that God remains hidden to protect free will.

Are All Atheists Secretly Resisting God?

Certain Christian readings of Romans 1 emphasize humanity's tendency to suppress knowledge of God through unrighteousness. This biblical theme deserves serious consideration, because Christianity does teach that reasoning, desires, moral choices, and spiritual perception can influence one another. Yet it would be a mistake to move from a general account of human sinfulness to the confident accusation that every individual atheist or agnostic knowingly rejects a God whom he or she secretly recognizes as real.

Consider an intelligent woman raised without religion who studies Christian arguments, reads the Gospels, explores philosophical theism, and sincerely wishes that eternal life

and divine love were real, yet remains unconvinced. Consider a young man who grew up in a Christian household but, after unanswered questions and painful encounters with hypocrisy, finds he no longer believes despite wishing he could recover his former faith. Consider a person born into a different religious tradition who never has a meaningful opportunity to examine Jesus' historical claims. Their circumstances differ, but each invites us to ask whether unbelief must always be deliberate resistance.

Some theologians argue that all unbelief ultimately reflects the effects of sin, even when the individual does not consciously recognize those effects. Merely asserting that thesis cannot settle the philosophical issue. Schellenberg can reasonably ask how such a claim could be demonstrated in a particular case and whether it risks defining away every counterexample. (Cambridge University Press, On Sin-Based Responses to Divine Hiddenness)

An especially revealing admission comes from **Dr. Thomas Nagel (born 1937)**, the influential American atheist philosopher and professor emeritus of philosophy and law at New York University. In his 1997 book *The Last Word*, Nagel candidly acknowledges that disbelief is not always an exclusively intellectual matter, but may also involve deeply personal desires concerning the kind of universe one hopes actually exists. Speaking about his own attitude toward religion, he writes, **“I want atheism to be true”**, later adding, **“I don’t want there to be a God.”** Nagel describes this disposition as a *cosmic authority problem*, suggesting that some resistance to religious belief may arise from discomfort with the possibility of an ultimate authority over human existence. His admission is particularly significant because it comes not from a Christian apologist seeking to discredit atheism, but from a respected atheist philosopher honestly examining his own intellectual motivations. Yet we must distinguish what Nagel actually establishes from what some Christians might wish to conclude. His testimony demonstrates that personal preferences can influence unbelief, just as desires for eternal life, divine protection, or ultimate justice can influence religious belief; it does not establish that every atheist secretly recognizes God's existence or deliberately suppresses that knowledge. The larger lesson is that **neither belief nor unbelief should be presumed free from personal influences, and neither should be dismissed without examining the evidence.** The appropriate question is not simply what a person wishes were true, but whether the available historical, philosophical, scientific, and theological evidence justifies the conclusions that person has reached. (Dr. Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word*, Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 130–131.)

As a former atheist, I am concerned that Christians not replace investigation with assumptions about motives they cannot observe. People may rationalize unbelief, just as

religious people may rationalize belief for reasons unrelated to truth. The appropriate response to an unbeliever who sincerely requests evidence is to examine that evidence, answer actual objections, acknowledge trauma when it is present, and remember that only God fully knows the heart.

The Ancient Problem: When Scripture Itself Asks Why God Is Silent

Divine hiddenness did not begin with modern atheism. Long before contemporary philosophers developed formal arguments, the Hebrew Scriptures preserved anguished questions about God's apparent absence. David asks how long God will hide His face (Psalm 13:1–2). The lamenter in Psalm 22:1–2 cries out without receiving an apparent answer. Psalm 88 concludes without an easy emotional resolution. Biblical faith does not always move immediately from anguish to reassurance.

Randy Alcorn (born 1954), Christian theologian, bestselling author of more than sixty books, and founder of Eternal Perspective Ministries, makes a remarkable observation in his extensive investigation, *If God Is Good: Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil* (2009). Far from concealing humanity's most troubling questions concerning God's goodness, justice, and apparent silence, Alcorn observes that **"No other book asks so bluntly, passionately, and frequently why God permits evil."** Indeed, the Bible does not begin by denying the reality of suffering, nor does it conclude without addressing its ultimate defeat. From humanity's fall in Genesis, through Job's anguished protests, the lamentations of Israel's prophets, Christ's suffering on the Cross, and the promised

restoration of all things in Revelation, Scripture repeatedly confronts the very questions skeptics and believers continue asking today. Alcorn further emphasizes that the problem of evil occupies a central place in the Bible's unfolding account of redemption. His observation reminds us that Christianity's foundational writings do not demand that difficult questions be suppressed; remarkably, they preserve those questions within the sacred text itself, often without offering the immediate explanations their human authors desperately sought. (Randy Alcorn, *If God Is Good: Chapter Summaries*, Chapter Two, 2009; *If God Will Ultimately Destroy Evil Why Does He Allow It to Exist Now?*, Eternal Perspective Ministries, February 17, 2011.)

Job searches for God without finding Him, even while affirming that God knows his path (Job 23:8–10). Isaiah acknowledges the reality of a God who appears hidden (Isaiah 45:15). Most remarkably, Jesus speaks the opening words of Psalm 22 during His crucifixion, placing the anguish of apparent abandonment near the center of Christianity's own proclamation (Matthew 27:45–46).

An especially revealing biblical example appears in the experience of the prophet Habakkuk, who confronted not merely personal suffering but the apparent inactivity of God while injustice spread throughout his nation. Disturbed by violence, corruption, and the suffering of the innocent, Habakkuk cried out, **"How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen?"** (Habakkuk 1:2). God's subsequent response was extraordinary: He declared that He was already accomplishing something among the nations that Habakkuk would scarcely believe even if it were explained to him (Habakkuk 1:5). Yet the revelation did not immediately resolve the prophet's difficulties; God's announced use of Babylon as an instrument of judgment raised even more troubling questions about divine justice. Habakkuk therefore demonstrates that **recognizing God's activity does not necessarily mean understanding His purposes or approving of the means through which history unfolds.** The prophet ultimately moves toward an expression of trust despite the prospect of economic devastation and national catastrophe (Habakkuk 3:17–19). His experience introduces a distinction central to divine hiddenness: the inability to perceive what God is doing is not necessarily evidence that He is doing nothing, although that possibility alone does not prove divine action in every circumstance where Heaven appears silent.

These texts do not settle the modern philosophical problem. They do demonstrate that the experience of apparent divine silence is not foreign to Scripture. Faithful biblical persons struggled with it, protested it, and sometimes received no immediate explanation. Any Christian response that treats all such questioning as rebellion fails to take its own sacred texts seriously.

From Augustine to Aquinas: Has God Been Speaking Through Creation All Along?

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430), one of Christianity's most influential theologians, developed an account of human beings whose ultimate fulfillment rests in God. His *Confessions* describes the restless search for truth and enduring love, recounting intellectual uncertainty, philosophical exploration, and competing commitments before his conversion. He asked whether our pursuit of truth, goodness, beauty, meaning, and lasting love can direct us toward a deeper reality. Such experiences do not establish Christianity by themselves, but they suggest that seeking God may involve reason, memory, desire, and conscience together. (St. Augustine, Confessions)

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), Dominican philosopher and theologian, formulated five celebrated arguments concerning motion, causation, contingency, degrees of perfection, and the ordering of nature. His reasoning moves from observable effects to philosophical conclusions about the ultimate explanation of those effects. Yet even if an argument establishes a necessary first cause, additional reasoning is needed to identify that cause with the personal God of Christianity; still more is needed to establish the identity of Jesus and His Resurrection. (Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I, Question 2)

Long before Augustine and Aquinas developed their influential theological and philosophical arguments, **the Apostle Paul declared that the invisible God has made aspects of His nature recognizable through the visible creation itself.** In Romans

1:20, Paul writes, “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.” This remarkable declaration forms a biblical foundation for what theologians call *general revelation*: the conviction that God has provided evidence of His existence, power, and wisdom through the created order. The psalmist similarly proclaims that the heavens declare God's glory and that the skies reveal the work of His hands (Psalm 19:1–4). Paul reinforces this teaching when addressing the Athenians, explaining that the Creator established the world and ordered human history so that people might seek Him, even though He is not far from any of us (Acts 17:24–28). Scripture also connects divine revelation with human conscience, describing how moral awareness bears witness to obligations that transcend merely written religious laws (Romans 2:14–15). Taken together, these passages present a profound Christian response to divine hiddenness: **God may be invisible to our physical eyes without being entirely concealed from human reason, conscience, or experience.** Yet they also sharpen the philosophical question this investigation must confront: If God's eternal power and divine nature are sufficiently evident through creation, why do so many intelligent, thoughtful, and apparently sincere individuals remain unconvinced that He exists?

There is, however, a crucial distinction between recognizing evidence of a Creator and knowing who that Creator is. A person may look upon the extraordinary order of the universe, the intricacy of living organisms, or the vastness of the heavens and conclude that intelligence lies behind existence, yet remain uncertain whether that intelligence is personal, loving, or concerned with humanity. Indeed, **the natural world may raise the question of God's existence without fully answering the question of God's identity.** This distinction helps explain why Christianity regards general revelation as significant but not sufficient to communicate the full message of redemption. The New Testament presents Jesus Christ as the supreme revelation of God's character, declaring that the Son has made the unseen Father known (John 1:18; Hebrews 1:1–3). Thus, creation may provide reasons to investigate whether God exists, while the historical claims concerning Christ invite us to examine what kind of God He is.

Augustine and Aquinas together challenge the assumption that God's existence can be evaluated only by asking whether He has visibly appeared in the sky. Classical Christianity proposes that creation and human rational and moral experience may point toward a Creator, while special revelation communicates the particular claims concerning Israel and Christ. The question is whether such avenues provide sufficiently compelling evidence for persons sincerely seeking God.

Blaise Pascal: Why Might God Provide Light Without Overwhelming Certainty?

Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), French mathematician, physicist, and Christian philosopher, examined the limitations of human reason and the moral and existential dimensions of faith. In his *Pensées*, Pascal suggests that God's manner of revelation may allow both recognition and obscurity, inviting seekers without overwhelming all possibility of resistance. His reflections on diversion also warn that people of every conviction can avoid ultimate questions through distraction, achievement, pleasure, and habitual busyness. (Blaise Pascal, Pensées)

Pascal also recognized that human beings do not approach the question of God's existence as detached observers. Our deepest hopes, fears, ambitions, and personal experiences can influence what evidence we find persuasive and what conclusions we are willing to consider. His *Pensées* therefore invites readers to examine not only the arguments for and against God, but also the assumptions and desires they bring to those arguments. **The challenge is not simply whether evidence of God exists, but whether we are willing to examine it with intellectual honesty and personal openness.**This principle applies equally to the believer who fears discovering weaknesses in cherished convictions and the skeptic who may be reluctant to reconsider a firmly established worldview. (Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, particularly his reflections on diversion, belief, and the human condition.)

Pascal's insight must not be converted into the accusation that every sincere seeker necessarily finds God and therefore all remaining doubters must be dishonest. That is precisely the question Schellenberg challenges. Pascal contributes a richer account of the whole person who investigates religious claims, but no single observation about human psychology explains every apparently sincere unbeliever.

Why Doesn't God Simply Appear to Everyone?

Suppose that tomorrow a clear, intelligible supernatural declaration appeared across the sky in every human language, repeated under rigorous observation and accompanied by events not plausibly explained by known natural causes. Such an occurrence could offer extraordinary evidence of an intelligence or agency beyond ordinary nature. It would not, however, automatically identify its source as the perfectly loving God of Christianity; the message, moral character, and competing explanations would still require scrutiny. Nor would knowledge of a supernatural being compel anyone to love or worship that being.

The biblical narratives themselves complicate the claim that unmistakable manifestations necessarily produce obedience. Israel is depicted as witnessing dramatic deliverances and still rebelling. John's Gospel describes people who encountered Jesus' works but remained resistant or unconvinced (Exodus 32; John 12:37–43). These are internal features of biblical narrative rather than independent verification of each event, but they make the theological point clear: revelation and obedient love are not identical.

Nevertheless, the skeptic's essential question survives. If unmistakable evidence can increase belief without eliminating freedom, why does a perfectly loving God not provide it to sincere seekers? We may propose that universal public manifestations would alter society, freedom, authority, and the conditions of moral formation, but an adequate response must explain why those consequences justify leaving particular receptive persons uncertain.

Why Doesn’t God Provide Exhaustive Evidence? The Difference Between Believing God Exists and Choosing to Love Him

One of the most important distinctions in this investigation is the difference between **sufficient evidence for reasonable belief and exhaustive knowledge that eliminates virtually every conceivable doubt.** In science, history, medicine, and personal relationships, we routinely make consequential judgments based on substantial evidence without possessing all possible information. The Christian question, therefore, is whether God has provided reasonable grounds to recognize His existence and character, not whether He has disclosed everything that an omniscient being could disclose. As a former atheist, I became convinced through a cumulative investigation rather than because every intellectual mystery had disappeared.

Knowledge of God's existence is not identical to loving God. A person may know beyond any question that another individual exists and nevertheless decline that person's

friendship. Likewise, the New Testament distinguishes acknowledgment of God from trust, repentance, allegiance, and love. James observes that even demons believe God exists without responding in faithful obedience (James 2:19). Jesus also distinguishes familiarity with religious writings from willingly coming to Him (John 5:39–40). Therefore, even an unmistakable manifestation could establish existence without manufacturing affection or moral fidelity.

Biblical faith includes reasoned trust in a person whose character and promises are regarded as reliable. It is neither an instruction to ignore evidence nor a demand for exhaustive explanation. Hebrews 11:1 connects faith with confidence concerning what is not yet seen, while 2 Corinthians 5:7 contrasts the present walk of faith with sight. The distinction does not make evidence unimportant; it identifies the additional personal commitment involved in trusting God beyond present perception.

Could the degree and manner of divine revelation matter for the quality of a freely chosen relationship? An unceasing, publicly overwhelming display of divine authority might lead some people to comply from fear or calculation, even if it did not remove their capacity to refuse love. Philosopher **Dr. Paul K. Moser** argues that divine self-disclosure may be oriented toward morally transformative relationship rather than bare intellectual acknowledgment. On this account, God's aim would not simply be to maximize the number of people who assent to a proposition, but to invite persons into a renewed life shaped by His character. (Dr. Daniel Howard-Snyder and Dr. Adam Green, Hiddenness of God, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, discussion of transformative responses.)

This account must not be overstated. **Certainty that God exists would not force a person to love Him**; the biblical narratives themselves portray resistance even in the presence of extraordinary revelation. More importantly, Schellenberg's nonresistant seeker may already desire precisely the loving and transformative relationship that this explanation describes. Thus, moral formation and free response provide a possible rationale for the shape of divine revelation, not a demonstrated explanation of why each receptive person remains uncertain.

The proposition I would emphasize is this: **God need not disclose exhaustive knowledge of Himself to make relationship possible, but a perfectly loving God would have compelling reason to make Himself genuinely knowable.** Christianity claims that creation, conscience, Scripture, and above all Jesus Christ offer substantial grounds for recognizing Him. The continuing challenge is to examine whether those grounds really are accessible and persuasive to sincere seekers. The distinction between

sufficient and exhaustive evidence is therefore central to the Christian answer, but it must remain in conversation with the problem of genuine nonresistant nonbelief.

Has God Already Revealed Himself Through the Universe?

One of Christianity's oldest claims is that creation offers witness to its Creator. The argument can begin without assuming biblical authority: Why does anything exist rather than nothing? Why are mathematical laws intelligible? Why do fundamental physical conditions permit stars, complex chemistry, planets, and conscious organisms? Modern cosmology describes an observable universe with an evolutionary history of approximately 13.8 billion years, supported by evidence from cosmic expansion and the cosmic microwave background. It does not by itself settle whether physical reality ultimately requires a transcendent personal cause.

Cosmological arguments examine contingency, causal explanation, and the possibility of a necessary ground of reality. Some philosophers defend the thesis that contingent things ultimately require a necessary explanation; others dispute that principle or question whether the explanation must be personal. A persuasive argument for ultimate causation does not automatically prove every Christian doctrine. Yet it can form one component of a cumulative inquiry into whether the natural universe provides evidence of God. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Cosmological Argument Natural Theology)

Consider, moreover, the extraordinary testimony of the natural world itself. From the microscopic complexity of a single living cell—with its molecular machinery, genetic information, intricate biochemical processes, and remarkable capacity for reproduction—to the astonishing coordination of organs within the human body, the delicate interdependence of Earth's ecosystems, the mathematical regularity of planetary orbits, and the immense stellar systems and galaxies extending across billions of light-years, creation presents a breathtaking panorama of beauty, complexity, intelligibility, and physical precision. **If God truly designed and sustains this universe, how much more evidence of His creative power should we reasonably expect Him to provide? (Please read that question again.)** Must the Creator personally appear in the heavens when the heavens themselves may already bear witness to His existence? The Apostle Paul's declaration in Romans 1:20 takes on particular significance here: God's invisible qualities, including His eternal power and divine nature, are understood through what He has made. David similarly asks us to contemplate the heavens, the moon, and the stars as the work of God's hands (Psalm 8:3–4). **The Christian argument is not that complexity automatically proves divine design, but that the cumulative beauty, extraordinary organization, mathematical intelligibility, and life-permitting characteristics of creation may themselves constitute a profound form of divine self-disclosure.** The universe, on this understanding, is not merely the setting in which humanity searches for God; it may also be one of the principal means through which the Creator has already made His existence recognizable.

There is another remarkable dimension to this question: **Not only does the universe display an astonishing richness of natural phenomena, but human beings possess the capacity to investigate, understand, and appreciate them.**Through mathematics, scientific observation, and increasingly sophisticated instruments, we have discovered realities that remained hidden from previous generations, from the microscopic structures of living organisms to galaxies so distant that their light has traveled billions of years before reaching our telescopes. Each discovery expands our understanding of creation while revealing how much remains beyond our present knowledge. From a Christian perspective, this extraordinary correspondence between the intelligibility of nature and the rational capacities of the human mind is itself worthy of reflection. Perhaps the search for God involves more than asking why He has not appeared before our eyes; **perhaps it also involves recognizing the extraordinary intellectual gifts through which we are able to examine the universe He may have created.**

The hiddenness question remains: if the Creator intended the universe to serve as an indirect witness, why is the evidence disputed by competent scientists and philosophers?

A Christian may reply that the universe invites reasoned inference rather than constant supernatural spectacle. A critic may answer that a loving God could provide clearer evidence to receptive persons. Both positions require argument.

The Extraordinary Fine-Tuning of the Universe: Evidence of Design or an Unanswered Scientific Question?

Modern physics has revealed that the possibility of complex life depends upon fundamental features of the universe, including interaction strengths, particle masses, and cosmological conditions. The term *fine-tuning* describes the apparent sensitivity of life-permitting conditions to some parameter values. Theistic philosophers propose that such features may be more expected if an intelligent Creator intended a life-permitting universe. Critics appeal to anthropic selection, multiverse proposals, unknown deeper laws, and the difficulty of assigning probabilities to alternative universes. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Fine-Tuning Cambridge University Press, Cosmological Fine-Tuning: The View from 2025)

Fine-tuning is a legitimate subject of scientific and philosophical investigation; it is not a universally accepted scientific demonstration of God. Even if design proves a persuasive explanation, it would not independently establish the Trinity, Incarnation, or Resurrection. Those conclusions demand additional evidence. Christians strengthen their case by distinguishing what each argument can and cannot accomplish.

For readers wishing to examine the scientific case for God's existence in considerably greater depth, I have devoted an entire separate investigation to this subject, entitled *The Scientific Evidence for God: 10 Scientific Exhibits Pointing Toward an Intelligent Creator*. Drawing upon my own journey from atheism to Christian faith, this extensive research examines ten areas of scientific and philosophical inquiry, including the origin of the universe, thermodynamics, cosmic fine-tuning, biological information, and the remarkable intelligibility of nature. Rather than treating any single discovery as sufficient to establish every Christian doctrine, the investigation develops a cumulative argument that the physical universe provides substantial reasons to consider an intelligent Creator. Readers are invited to examine the cited scientific research, evaluate competing explanations, and determine whether the collective evidence points beyond the material universe itself. (Chaplain Todd DuBord, *The Scientific Evidence for God*, CrossFireUSA.)

What About Consciousness, Reason, and the Moral Law?

Human beings possess subjective awareness, contemplate reasons, recognize moral obligations, and experience love, grief, and responsibility. Some Christian philosophers argue that consciousness and reason are more intelligible if reality's ultimate foundation is personal and rational. Others contend that physical processes will ultimately explain consciousness, or that philosophical naturalism already supplies adequate accounts.

Unresolved questions in neuroscience should not become automatic proof of supernatural causes.

Moral experience raises related issues. Many people recognize cruelty, betrayal, and exploitation as wrong beyond mere personal preference. Theists argue that objective moral obligation is best grounded in God's character. Nonreligious philosophers defend moral realism and ethical obligation without theism. The Christian may interpret conscience as an element of general revelation, while admitting that moral awareness does not automatically yield conscious recognition of the biblical God (Romans 2:14–16).

These lines of inquiry mattered during my journey from atheism to Christianity. Their power was cumulative rather than confined to one supposedly decisive proof. I encourage readers to examine their premises, alternatives, and explanatory strengths rather than treating any scientific or philosophical mystery as an easy shortcut to a theological conclusion.

Does the Bible Claim That God Has Made Himself Known to Everyone?

The Bible presents creation as declaring God's glory and God's attributes as knowable through what has been made (Psalm 19:1–4; Romans 1:18–23). Paul also appeals to the created order and human history when addressing Gentile audiences (Acts 14:15–17;

Acts 17:22–31). The traditional theological distinction between general and special revelation matters here. Creation may reveal power, wisdom, and moral responsibility, but the specific claims of the Gospel require historical revelation and examination.

Romans 1 must not become a convenient means of diagnosing every modern skeptic's hidden intentions. Christians disagree concerning the precise relationship between general revelation, culpability, and the experiences of sincere doubters. What Scripture clearly maintains is that God has not left humanity without witness. The philosophical question remains whether the form and distribution of that witness accord with perfect divine love.

Are We Expecting God to Reveal Himself in a Way He Never Promised or Would Run Contrary to His Nature?

If someone expects an audible voice, vision, or unmistakable miracle, the absence of that specific experience can seem like evidence of divine silence. Biblical narratives, however, describe varied modes of revelation: dramatic signs, prophetic words, moral conviction, ordinary providence, historical action, and patient instruction. Elijah's encounter at Horeb is especially notable because the account distinguishes God's communication from surrounding displays of wind, earthquake, and fire (1 Kings 19:9–18).

But what might it actually mean for God to reveal Himself in a manner contrary to His nature? Scripture teaches that God's actions are always consistent with His character. For example, God cannot lie (Titus 1:2), deny Himself (2 Timothy 2:13), or act contrary to His perfect holiness (Habakkuk 1:13). Agape Love is His nature (1 John. 4:8 cf. 1 Corinthians 13) and it never boasts, so should He boast of his power, presence or love?

Dr. J. I. Packer (1926–2020), distinguished evangelical theologian and longtime professor at Regent College, emphasized that God's revelation must always be understood in light of His unchanging moral character. In his influential book *Knowing God* (1973), Packer observed, **"The character of God is today, and always will be, exactly what it was in Bible times."** His point is particularly relevant to divine hiddenness: God does not cease to be loving, truthful, holy, or gracious simply because humanity demands a more spectacular demonstration of His existence. Scripture declares that God is love (1 John 4:8), while Paul's description of agape love includes the remarkable assertion that love does not boast (1 Corinthians 13:4). Does this suggest that God, whose very nature is love, would have no desire to overwhelm humanity merely to advertise His own greatness? **There is an important distinction between revealing divine glory for a righteous purpose and displaying power simply to demand admiration.** Biblical accounts certainly portray God proclaiming His glory and exercising extraordinary authority, so we cannot conclude that dramatic manifestations are inherently contrary to His nature. Nevertheless, Packer's insight invites us to consider whether the manner in which God reveals Himself reflects not merely His unlimited power, but His equally perfect wisdom, holiness, humility, and love. The question is therefore not simply whether God possesses the ability to make Himself unmistakably visible, but whether every conceivable demonstration of His power would accomplish the relational and redemptive purposes consistent with His character. (Dr. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, InterVarsity Press, 1973, discussion of God's unchanging character; *The Character of God Does Not Change*.)

Therefore, a supposed divine revelation that encouraged cruelty, deception, or moral evil would contradict the character of the God Christianity proclaims. Similarly, **if God's purpose is to invite human beings into a genuine relationship of love and trust, we have reason to question whether a manifestation designed to produce nothing but terror, manipulation, or involuntary submission would reflect that purpose.** God's extraordinary power does not mean that every conceivable display of power would be consistent with His wisdom, goodness, or intentions. This does not establish that an unmistakable appearance would necessarily violate His nature—Scripture itself describes

dramatic divine manifestations—but it reminds us that **how God reveals Himself must be considered alongside who God has revealed Himself to be.**

Christians should not therefore promise that every emotional impression or coincidence is God's voice. Human beings can misinterpret patterns and project expectations onto ambiguous events. Discernment requires Scripture, reason, history, and humility. But the absence of one's preferred form of revelation does not establish the absence of every other proposed form.

Why Did God Reveal Himself Dramatically in Biblical Times but Not Today?

Scripture recounts burning bushes, prophetic visions, miraculous healings, and appearances of the risen Christ. These concentrated narratives may create the false impression that every person in biblical times witnessed constant miracles. In fact, the writings span centuries and focus heavily upon covenantal turning points and particular persons. Some periods are characterized by the rarity of prophetic revelation (1 Samuel 3:1).

C. S. Lewis (1898–1963), the distinguished Oxford and Cambridge scholar, former atheist, and influential Christian apologist, offered a particularly illuminating explanation in his landmark book *Miracles* (1947). Lewis argued that biblical miracles were not distributed randomly throughout history merely to satisfy humanity's curiosity, but

appeared in connection with significant moments in God's unfolding purposes. As he memorably observed, **“They come on great occasions”**, describing these extraordinary events as occurring at pivotal points in spiritual history rather than as routine features of everyday human experience. Lewis further maintained that miracles function as meaningful signs, revealing something about the Creator's character and redemptive intentions rather than merely displaying supernatural power. This perspective helps explain why the biblical record concentrates extraordinary events around Moses and the Exodus, the prophetic ministries, and especially the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. **If miracles serve particular revelatory and redemptive purposes, we should not necessarily expect them to occur with identical frequency in every generation or geographical location.** Nevertheless, this explanation leaves open the possibility that God continues to intervene today, while reminding us that the absence of a dramatic manifestation in one person's experience does not establish that God has ceased acting throughout the world. (C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*, 1947; C. S. Lewis Institute, *C. S. Lewis on Miracles: Why They Are Possible and Significant*, 2019.)

There is another important consideration often overlooked when comparing biblical miracles with our modern experience: **Most people who lived during biblical history never personally witnessed the extraordinary events recorded in Scripture.** Even among the ancient Israelites, knowledge of God's miraculous deliverance was frequently transmitted from parents to children through testimony, remembrance, and written accounts rather than repeated supernatural demonstrations. Moses instructed Israel to teach future generations about God's mighty acts (Deuteronomy 6:20–25), while the psalmist emphasized preserving the testimony of divine works so that generations yet unborn might place their trust in God (Psalm 78:4–7). This introduces a significant distinction: **God's revelation may occur at particular moments in history while its intended influence extends far beyond those who witnessed the original events.** Christianity maintains that the testimony concerning Jesus Christ serves precisely this purpose, allowing subsequent generations to investigate the claims of those who encountered Him (John 20:30–31). Thus, the question is not only why God does not continually reproduce ancient miracles, but whether the historical evidence He has permitted to survive provides sufficient grounds for reasonable belief today.

Some Christians argue that foundational miracles surrounding biblical revelation served unique historical purposes; others hold that comparable gifts continue today. Reports of contemporary miracles deserve assessment of witness reliability, documentation, plausible natural explanations, and the distinction between an unexplained event and a demonstrated supernatural cause. Our previous theodicy study explored evidence related

to healing and answered prayer, but even credible extraordinary events would not explain why sincere seekers receive differing degrees of assurance.

Thomas the Doubter: Did Jesus Condemn a Man for Asking for Evidence?

The Disciple Thomas missed an appearance of the risen Jesus to other disciples and requested evidence connected to Jesus' wounds. John's Gospel then portrays Jesus meeting that evidential challenge and Thomas responding with a confession of His identity. Jesus blesses those who believe without having seen, while the evangelist explains that the recorded signs were written so subsequent readers might believe (John 20:24–31).

Dr. Craig S. Keener (born 1960), distinguished New Testament scholar and professor of biblical studies at Asbury Theological Seminary, provides an especially illuminating interpretation of Thomas's encounter with the risen Christ in his monumental two-volume work, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2003). Keener observes that **"Thomas's very skepticism makes him the ideal proponent of a high Christology,"** because the extraordinary evidence that transformed his unbelief culminated in one of the most explicit declarations of Jesus' divine identity in the New Testament: "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). Significantly, Keener explains that John's account was written for generations who could not personally witness Jesus' earthly ministry or Resurrection but

would encounter these claims through the testimony of those who had. Thomas therefore represents more than a skeptical disciple whose doubts were answered; **his experience becomes part of the historical testimony through which subsequent readers are invited to investigate the identity of Christ.** The distinction is especially relevant to divine hiddenness because Christianity does not demand that every generation reproduce Thomas's physical encounter before reaching a reasonable conclusion. Rather, it presents the apostolic testimony as evidence intended to extend the significance of that encounter beyond its original eyewitnesses. Yet this leaves us with a vital question: If Thomas's skepticism was answered through direct personal revelation, what makes the surviving historical testimony sufficiently reliable for those who must evaluate the same extraordinary claim nearly two thousand years later? (Dr. Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, Hendrickson Publishers, 2003, commentary on John 20:24–29, "The Climactic Christological Confession.")

There is a remarkable detail in John's account that is frequently overlooked. Although Thomas initially insisted that he would not believe without personally examining Jesus' wounds, the Gospel never actually records him touching them. Instead, Jesus invites him to examine the physical evidence, and Thomas immediately responds with his extraordinary confession of faith (John 20:27–28). **Was it the visible evidence of the wounds, the personal encounter with the risen Christ, or the realization that Jesus knew the very doubts Thomas had expressed in His absence that brought him to faith?** The narrative does not explicitly identify which consideration proved decisive, and perhaps that is part of its significance. Thomas encountered more than an argument for the Resurrection; he encountered the One whose identity the evidence was intended to establish. Jesus then pronounced a blessing upon those who would believe without possessing Thomas's firsthand experience (John 20:29). **The lesson is not that evidence becomes unnecessary, but that evidence can lead beyond intellectual recognition into personal trust and worship.** For our investigation into divine hiddenness, this distinction is especially meaningful: recognizing sufficient grounds for God's existence and responding to Him in faith are intimately connected, yet they are not precisely the same thing.

The account should not be used to condemn all requests for evidence. It portrays an encounter grounded in the extraordinary historical claim being made. Yet it also sharpens the hiddenness question: if Jesus accommodated Thomas personally, why must subsequent generations rely on ancient testimony? A Christian may appeal to the distinctive apostolic role and preservation of historical evidence, but that answer deserves examination rather than repetition.

What If God Himself Stepped into Human History to Reveal Who He Is?

There is a question that changes the direction of this entire investigation: **What if God has already done something more personal than appearing in the clouds or issuing a supernatural declaration across the sky? What if the eternal Creator entered His own creation and revealed His character through an actual human life?** Christianity makes precisely that claim. It proclaims that God the Son assumed human nature, lived among ordinary people, shared their vulnerability, and acted within verifiable first-century history. If that claim is true, the question is not simply why God has never appeared, but why He chose this particular form of personal revelation.

John's Gospel identifies the eternal Word as divine and involved in creation before declaring that the Word became flesh (John 1:1–3; John 1:14). Paul describes Christ as the image of the invisible God, the One through whom and for whom all things were created, and in whom all things hold together (Colossians 1:15–20). He further declares that the fullness of Deity dwells bodily in Christ (Colossians 2:9). Hebrews describes the Son as the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being (Hebrews 1:1–3). These are not merely assertions that a teacher learned about God, but New Testament claims about God's own self-disclosure through the Incarnation.

The Gospels also portray Jesus making claims that provoked controversy about His identity. After He declares, '**I and the Father are one**', His opponents object that He, a

mere man, is claiming to be God (John 10:30–33). Jesus goes on to appeal to His works in defending His claims (John 10:34–38). Elsewhere, He tells Philip that to see Him is to see the Father (John 14:9); Mark records controversy over Jesus' authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:5–12). These accounts require historical scrutiny, but they make clear that the New Testament's Christological claims concern divine authority, not merely admirable ethical teaching.

Dr. Richard Bauckham (born 1946), distinguished New Testament scholar and professor emeritus at the University of St Andrews, argues that the earliest Christians did not merely regard Jesus as a remarkable prophet or heavenly representative, but understood Him as participating in the unique divine identity of Israel's God. In his influential *Jesus and the God of Israel* (2008), Bauckham emphasizes that Christ's humiliation, crucifixion, and exaltation constitute **"the definitive revelation of who God is."** His research reinforces Christianity's extraordinary answer to divine hiddenness: **God did not simply announce His existence from Heaven; He revealed His identity and character through the life, suffering, and redemptive mission of Jesus Christ.** (Dr. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity*, Eerdmans, 2008.)

Why does this matter for divine hiddenness? A supernatural sign might offer striking evidence of power without revealing whether the being behind it is compassionate, just, merciful, or willing to suffer for others. The Gospels claim that those qualities became visible through Jesus' encounters with the vulnerable, His resistance to hypocrisy, and His sacrificial death. The Incarnation presents revelation as **personal and relational, not merely spectacular**. Yet it also invites a serious question: why did God reveal Himself through one historical life whose testimony later generations must assess, rather than through equally direct experiences for everyone?

These extraordinary claims must also be investigated against the surviving historical record, including testimony from ancient writers who were not Christians. Jesus lived in first-century Roman Judea, and His existence, execution, and the early movement associated with His name are supported by important non-Christian sources. The distinguished Roman historian **Cornelius Tacitus (c. 56–120)**, writing in his *Annals* around A.D. 116, reported that Christus had suffered execution under Pontius Pilate during the reign of Emperor Tiberius and that His followers subsequently spread from Judea to Rome. Even earlier, the Jewish historian **Flavius Josephus (c. 37–100)** referred to Jesus in his *Antiquities of the Jews* (c. A.D. 93–94), most securely identifying James as the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ. Josephus also contains a

longer passage discussing Jesus and His crucifixion, although scholars continue debating how much of its surviving wording reflects later Christian alterations. The Roman governor **Pliny the Younger (c. 61–113)**, writing to Emperor Trajan around A.D. 112, documented Christians gathering to sing hymns honoring Christ as a god, demonstrating that devotion to Jesus had become established well beyond Judea. The Roman biographer **Suetonius (c. 69–after 122)** likewise recorded Emperor Nero's punishment of Christians, although his separate reference to disturbances involving someone called *Chrestus* under Claudius remains historically disputed. **These independent, non-Christian sources do not prove Jesus' divine identity or Resurrection; they do, however, strengthen the historical foundation upon which Christianity's extraordinary claims must be evaluated.** The essential question is therefore not whether Jesus was merely an invented religious figure, but what He actually claimed, how His earliest followers understood Him, and whether the surviving evidence justifies Christianity's conviction that God Himself entered human history. (Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44; Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.9.1 and *Antiquities*, 18.3.3; Pliny the Younger, *Letters*, 10.96–97; Suetonius, *Nero*, 16.)

There is something remarkable about this convergence of ancient testimony. **Christianity's central figure emerges not from an unidentified age of mythology, but from a recognizable historical setting involving identifiable rulers, geographical locations, religious controversies, and surviving documentary sources.** While these records cannot independently establish that Jesus was God incarnate, they remind us that Christianity's extraordinary claim of divine self-revelation is inseparably connected to events in human history. **If God truly entered our world, then history itself becomes one of the places where we should expect to discover evidence of His presence.**

For readers who remain uncertain about Jesus' extraordinary claims to divinity, I invite you to examine my separate, in-depth historical and biblical investigation, *Was Jesus REALLY the Son of God?* Drawing upon my own journey from atheism to Christianity, this research examines the evidence surrounding Jesus' identity, His claims to divine authority, and the testimony of those who encountered Him, inviting skeptics and believers alike to investigate whether He truly was who He claimed to be. (Chaplain Todd DuBord, M.Div., *Was Jesus REALLY the Son of God? — Free Downloads & Research*, CrossFireUSA; scroll down to locate the treatise.)

If the Incarnation is true, God has not remained wholly silent or inaccessible. The objection becomes why revelation took this particular historical form, why evidence is

mediated through testimony, and why its persuasiveness remains uneven. Those questions are genuine, but they differ from the assertion that Christianity makes no claim of divine self-disclosure.

The Resurrection: Was God's Greatest Revelation an Event in History?

Paul explicitly connects Christianity's truth to whether Jesus was raised from the dead. In 1 Corinthians 15, he transmits an early summary concerning Jesus' death, burial, Resurrection, and reported appearances, making clear that a merely symbolic interpretation is inadequate to his own proclamation (1 Corinthians 15:3–19). Scholars widely recognize that Paul is transmitting early tradition, although they disagree about its precise formation and implications.

That early Christians believed Jesus rose is historically well supported. That some claimed appearances is likewise established by early testimony. Whether Jesus was objectively and bodily resurrected requires additional evaluation of historical sources, alternative explanations, and philosophical judgments about divine action. Christian scholars favor the Resurrection as the best explanation; skeptical scholars dispute whether historical methods justify that conclusion. The investigation should neither

bypass those objections nor pretend that the early creed alone proves every element of the Gospel accounts.

But how compelling is the historical evidence that Jesus actually rose from the dead? For readers who wish to investigate that extraordinary question far beyond the scope of our present discussion, I have devoted an extensive, separate research treatise to the subject: ***10 BEST PROOFS for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ***. In this investigation, I examine ten major lines of evidence, drawing upon New Testament scholarship, ancient historical sources, philosophical arguments, and critical assessments of alternative explanations. These include the extraordinarily early testimony preserved in 1 Corinthians 15, the transformation of the earliest disciples, the remarkable emergence of Resurrection belief within first-century Judaism, the testimony of women at the empty tomb, and questions surrounding the reported appearances of the risen Christ. I also investigate whether hallucinations, legendary development, mistaken identity, or the alleged removal of Jesus' body adequately explain the historical evidence. **As a former atheist who once questioned Christianity's most foundational claims, I invite skeptics, agnostics, and believers alike to examine this evidence for themselves.** If Jesus truly conquered death, the implications extend far beyond a religious tradition or philosophical theory; they concern the identity of Jesus Christ, the reality of divine intervention, the credibility of Christianity, and humanity's ultimate hope beyond the grave. (Chaplain Todd DuBord, M.Div., *10 BEST PROOFS for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, CrossFireUSA.)

Another extraordinary consideration is that **the Resurrection was not presented by the earliest Christians as an isolated supernatural occurrence, but as the fulfillment of a much larger redemptive purpose unfolding through centuries of biblical history.** Following His Resurrection, Jesus is portrayed as explaining to two disciples on the road to Emmaus how the Scriptures pointed toward the Messiah's suffering and subsequent glory (Luke 24:25–27). The Apostle Peter likewise proclaimed that Jesus' Resurrection fulfilled God's promises concerning the Messiah (Acts 2:22–32). These claims invite examination of whether the early Christian interpretation of Israel's Scriptures was historically and theologically justified, but they also reveal something significant about the nature of Christian revelation: **God's claimed intervention was understood as part of an unfolding historical narrative, not merely a spectacular event intended to impress its immediate witnesses.** If the Resurrection truly occurred, its significance would extend far beyond those who first encountered the risen Christ, becoming the central historical testimony through which succeeding generations are invited to investigate whether God has decisively revealed Himself in human history.

If the Resurrection occurred, it would offer evidence of divine action far beyond general philosophical theism. If it did not, Christianity's central claim to unique revelation would face a devastating challenge. For divine hiddenness, the question is therefore not only why God has not appeared to us individually but whether He has already acted decisively in history in a way subsequent generations may examine.

Why Would God Reveal Himself Through One Man in One Place at One Time?

Why should a Creator of billions of people reveal Himself decisively through a Jewish teacher in first-century Roman Judea? Why not deliver an unmistakable message to every civilization and generation simultaneously? The Incarnation provides a theological framework for particular historical revelation, but it does not erase its geographical and chronological asymmetry. Christian witness subsequently depended on fallible human communication, translation, culture, and institutions.

Indeed, **the Apostle Paul presents an extraordinary theological explanation for why God's redemptive purposes would center upon one man whose actions would affect all humanity.** In Romans 5:12–19, Paul draws a remarkable parallel between Adam and Jesus Christ: just as sin and death entered human experience through the disobedience of one man, God's gift of righteousness and life comes through the obedience of another. In Romans 5:17, he explicitly contrasts the reign of death through Adam with the

promise of life through **“the one man, Jesus Christ.”** Paul reinforces this pattern in 1 Corinthians 15:21–22, explaining that death came through a man and that the Resurrection of the dead likewise comes through a man. The same redemptive pattern reaches back to Abraham, whose promised offspring Paul ultimately identifies with Christ (Galatians 3:16). When the appointed time arrived, God sent His Son, born of a woman, to accomplish humanity's redemption (Galatians 4:4–5). **Thus, Christianity's claim that God revealed Himself decisively through one man, in one place, at one particular moment in history, reflects a consistent biblical pattern: the actions of one divinely appointed representative can carry consequences extending to every nation and generation.** Jesus Christ, understood by Christianity as God the Son incarnate, was not merely another religious messenger; He was the One through whom God's promised redemption would become available to the world.

Dr. N. T. Wright (born 1948), distinguished New Testament historian and former Bishop of Durham, provides a compelling scholarly explanation for this remarkable pattern of divine revelation. In his influential study, *Jesus and the Identity of God*, Wright argues that God's selection of Abraham and Israel was never intended to restrict His redemptive purposes to one people, but rather to bring His promised salvation to the entire world. He explains that Jesus must be understood within this unfolding historical narrative, as the Messiah in whom God's promises to Israel reach their decisive fulfillment. Wright writes, **“It is precisely because Jesus of Nazareth is the fulfillment of this promise that he is relevant in all times and places.”** Consider the extraordinary implication for our investigation into divine hiddenness: **What appears to skeptics as God's puzzling decision to reveal Himself through one Jewish man in an obscure corner of the Roman Empire is understood within Christianity as the fulfillment of a centuries-long plan intended to bless every nation on earth.** The geographical particularity of the Incarnation, therefore, does not necessarily contradict the universal scope of God's love. Rather, as Wright's scholarship emphasizes, the Christian claim is that God worked through the history of one people, culminating in one extraordinary individual, to accomplish a redemption whose significance would extend to all humanity. (Dr. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Identity of God*, *Ex Auditu*, vol. 14, 1998, pp. 42–56.)

The biblical story presents a divine purpose unfolding through particular people for the benefit of many nations, from Abraham's call to the commission to make disciples (Genesis 12:1–3; Matthew 28:18–20). That historical form gives Christians a responsibility to translate, teach, preserve, and communicate faithfully. The Church's failures in this responsibility have sometimes obscured rather than clarified the message it was commanded to share.

Religious Geography: Why Does Birthplace Influence What People Believe?

Religious beliefs are strongly influenced by family, culture, language, educational opportunities, and geography. Someone born in a predominantly Muslim community is more likely to inherit Islamic categories; a child raised in a secular household may lack substantial exposure to organized religion. Philosophers including Dr. Stephen Maitzen and Dr. Jason Marsh have pressed the question of why a loving God would permit apparently unequal distributions of belief and access to revelation. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Hiddenness of God Cambridge University Press, Counting Hiddenness)

Dr. Max Baker-Hytch, a philosopher whose research at the University of Oxford examined religious belief and divine hiddenness, offers an important response to this geographical objection. In his scholarly article, *Mutual Epistemic Dependence and the Demographic Divine Hiddenness Problem* (2016), he argues that the unequal distribution of belief need not contradict the existence of a loving God. Human beings acquire much of their knowledge through parents, teachers, communities, and shared traditions rather than through independent, firsthand discovery. Baker-Hytch proposes that God may have good reasons for creating humanity with this profound dependence upon one another, even though such an arrangement predictably produces geographical differences in religious belief. **This raises a fascinating possibility: What if God's purpose was**

never to communicate every truth independently to every person, but to create a world in which human beings bear responsibility for transmitting knowledge, exercising discernment, and sharing revelation across generations and nations? Christianity's Great Commission reflects precisely such a responsibility, commanding disciples to carry Christ's teachings to all nations (Matthew 28:18–20). Baker-Hytch's explanation does not settle every question about those who never receive a meaningful opportunity to encounter Christianity, but it offers a substantial philosophical reason why unequal religious geography does not automatically disprove divine love. **The existence of cultural influences upon belief may therefore reveal something important about the way God created human societies, rather than demonstrating that God has abandoned particular societies to spiritual ignorance.** (Dr. Max Baker-Hytch, *Mutual Epistemic Dependence and the Demographic Divine Hiddenness Problem*, *Religious Studies*, 52, no. 3, 2016, pp. 375–394.)

Culture influences how beliefs are acquired, but the origin of a belief is not the same as its truth. A child may learn correct astronomy through parents or teachers; another may acquire inaccurate claims through the same process. Christians and skeptics must therefore test claims by evidence, not merely by their cultural ancestry. Nevertheless, uneven opportunities remain a serious theological question that should not be denied or trivialized.

What About People Who Never Hear the Name of Jesus?

If salvation is uniquely grounded in Christ, what of those who never hear the Gospel or encounter only a distorted presentation? Christian traditions disagree about explicit faith, the application of Christ's saving work, and the fate of those without meaningful access. The New Testament affirms Christ's unique role and God's impartial justice, without giving us exhaustive information about every individual destiny (John 14:6; Romans 2:6–16; Acts 10:34–35). In the end, no one will accuse God of being unjust.

Christians may confidently affirm that God knows every person's heart, opportunities, intentions, and circumstances without claiming that they possess the same knowledge. Historical inequality of access is real. Any adequate theology of revelation must account for it rather than blame all ignorance upon the individual who has never heard.

Could Temporary Hiddenness Serve Purposes We Do Not Yet Understand?

An omniscient God, if one exists, would know consequences and purposes beyond any human observer's perspective. Our inability to identify a sufficient reason for an event does not logically prove that none exists. This epistemic caution is related to discussions of skeptical theism. Yet the mere possibility of a hidden reason does not establish that God possesses one, and unlimited appeals to mystery can make theological claims impossible to test.

We raised the same danger in the preceding treatise on suffering. Job encounters God without receiving an exhaustive explanation of his losses (Job 38–42). His story invites humility, but not the abandonment of ordinary moral judgment or historical investigation. Mystery must remain a modest recognition of human limits, not a substitute for evidence or an excuse to ignore people in pain.

Why Do Some People Experience God Profoundly While Others Experience Nothing?

Throughout history, people have reported visions, profound peace, mystical encounters, apparent answers to prayer, and experiences interpreted as direct communion with God. Such reports arise in several religious traditions and sometimes support conflicting interpretations. Philosophers distinguish the evidential relevance of an experience to the person who has it from the strength of testimony offered to outsiders. Religious diversity and naturalistic interpretations are important challenges to treating experience as decisive proof. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Religious Experience)

A Christian's transformative experience need not be dismissed as meaningless, but neither may it establish that a sincere atheist who reports no corresponding experience is deliberately resisting God. The uneven distribution of such encounters is itself part of the hiddenness problem. Reports call for humility, discernment, and attention to corroborating evidence rather than presumptuous certainty about motives.

When God's Silence Follows Religious Abuse, Betrayal, or Disillusionment

For many, uncertainty about God emerges after abuse, hypocrisy, manipulation, or betrayal by institutions claiming to represent Him. The distinction between God and those who misrepresent Him may be intellectually correct, yet emotionally insufficient for people harmed under religious authority. Their experiences require truthful acknowledgment, protection, accountability, and compassion, not accusations of rebellion.

Dr. Diane Langberg, Christian psychologist and internationally recognized specialist in trauma and spiritual abuse, explains that the misuse of religious authority can profoundly damage a person's ability to trust God. In her book *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church* (2020), she observes that victims may come to perceive God through a **"gravely distorted lens,"** associating Him with the very suffering inflicted by those claiming to represent Him. Her research raises a crucial consideration for divine hiddenness: **What appears to be God's silence may, for some, be inseparable from the wounds inflicted by people who claimed to speak in His name.** Such individuals deserve compassion, protection, and an opportunity to investigate Christ apart from the abusive conduct of those who misrepresented Him. (Dr. Diane Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church*, Brazos Press, 2020, p. 7.)

Jesus Himself condemned religious leaders who burdened others while neglecting justice and mercy, and the New Testament warns against corrupt spiritual authority (Matthew 23; 1 Peter 5:1–4). A rejection of abusive religion does not automatically amount to a demonstration that Christ's historical claims are false. Conversely, religious abuse cannot be excused by appealing to the truth of those claims. Both distinctions must remain clear.

What If You Have Prayed for Years and Heard Nothing?

The most painful form of hiddenness may unfold at a bedside, after the loss of a child, or through years of profound loneliness. A person who has prayed sincerely and perceived no response may struggle not only with God's goodness but with His very existence. Our previous theodicy investigation warned against blaming unanswered prayer on defective faith. Paul's persistent affliction and Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane contradict any promise that the righteous always receive the relief they request (2 Corinthians 12:7–10; Luke 22:39–46).

Pastoral care requires listening before explaining. A person who asks God to reveal Himself and experiences silence is not necessarily demanding an unreasonable spectacle. No one should promise that enough prayer will produce an audible voice, miraculous sign, or immediate certainty. Christians may invite examination of historical and philosophical evidence while acknowledging that they do not know why a particular person's prayer has not received the answer desired.

Is Faith Believing Without Evidence?

Faith is sometimes defined as belief without evidence, but New Testament vocabulary carries meanings of trust, fidelity, allegiance, and confidence. The Gospel of Luke describes investigation of earlier testimony, John connects selected signs with belief, and Paul appeals to claimed witnesses of the Resurrection (Luke 1:1–4; John 20:30–31; 1 Corinthians 15). These passages resist the idea that Christian belief requires indifference to evidence.

Dr. Alister E. McGrath (born 1953), distinguished Oxford theologian, former professor of historical theology at the University of Oxford, and a former atheist with a doctorate in molecular biophysics, offers a particularly compelling perspective on the relationship between faith and evidence. Reflecting upon his intellectual journey from atheism to Christianity, McGrath acknowledges that he once regarded religious faith as an escape from evidence, but eventually came to understand it as **“warranted belief.”** As he explains, faith involves identifying good reasons for trusting a particular understanding of reality, even when absolute proof is unavailable. This distinction is crucial: **Christian faith is not intended to replace investigation with wishful thinking, but to place reasonable trust in conclusions supported by evidence, while recognizing the limits of human knowledge.** For those investigating divine hiddenness, McGrath's experience raises an important question: **Could the difficulty lie not in the complete absence of evidence for God, but in the expectation that genuine faith must first possess a**

degree of certainty rarely attainable in other important areas of human life? (Dr. Alister E. McGrath, *What Is Faith?*, Centre for Public Christianity, February 8, 2017.)

Responsible trust may go beyond exhaustive proof without violating reason. We form serious judgments in history, medicine, family life, and moral responsibility without omniscience. The question is whether the evidence is adequate for the particular conclusion and level of trust. Christian faith should not be characterized either as an irrational leap or as a mathematical theorem that removes every possible doubt.

Can Honest Doubt Become Part of a Serious Search for God?

Doubt may arise from inadequate information, conflicting evidence, trauma, disappointment, or the collapse of arguments once thought decisive. It can also involve unwillingness to consider unwelcome truths, but such resistance must not be presumed. The New Testament portrays Thomas asking for evidence, a father acknowledging both belief and unbelief, and John the Baptist seeking clarification while imprisoned (John 20:24–29; Mark 9:17–24; Matthew 11:2–6).

For sincere skeptics, the invitation is not to claim a belief they do not hold. It is to remain willing to examine reasons, revise assumptions, and distinguish strong evidence from weak claims. For Christians, the responsibility is to answer real objections, admit unresolved questions, and resist using confidence as a substitute for knowledge.

Would a Perfectly Loving God Allow Someone to Die Without Believing?

If unbelief carries eternal consequences, the moral difficulty of hiddenness increases. Christian traditions differ concerning salvation, explicit faith, accountability according to knowledge, and the destiny of those who lack meaningful access to Christian revelation. Scripture nevertheless emphasizes God's righteousness, impartiality, and knowledge of human circumstances (Romans 2:6–16; Genesis 18:25).

Dr. John Stott (1921–2011), distinguished evangelical theologian and biblical scholar, addressed this difficult question with remarkable humility. In *Evangelical Essentials* (1988), Stott maintained that Scripture does not fully disclose how God will judge those who have never heard the Gospel, concluding that we must **"leave them in the hands of the God of infinite mercy and justice."** His position neither diminishes Christ's unique saving work nor presumes knowledge of every person's eternal destiny. Rather, it directs our attention to a foundational biblical conviction: **the God who knows every human heart, circumstance, and opportunity will never judge unjustly.** (Dr. John Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue*, "Judgement and Hell", with David L. Edwards, 1988.)

Affirming divine justice does not supply a detailed verdict concerning every individual. Christians should refrain from pronouncing eternal destinies that God alone can judge.

But the hiddenness challenge is real: if ultimate relationship with God matters supremely, why is belief apparently more accessible to some people than others? Any coherent theological account must address that moral question.

Five Objections Christians Must Not Avoid

First, why does a God who desires relationship not make His existence universally certain? Historical mediation, moral transformation, and purposes exceeding bare assent are possible considerations, but none automatically resolves every nonresistant case. **Second,** does sincere atheism challenge claims that everybody already knows God? Yes, at least the simplistic assumption that all atheists consciously reject what they know; biblical general revelation and individual culpability must be distinguished.

Third, why should ancient testimony replace personal encounter? Historical testimony is a legitimate means of knowledge, but its reliability must be independently evaluated. **Fourth,** if creation reveals God, why do capable scholars disagree? Evidence is interpreted through competing metaphysical frameworks; disagreement invites investigation rather than accusations of dishonesty.

Fifth, does mystery make Christianity unfalsifiable? It can when deployed carelessly. Positive claims about Jesus, history, creation, and revelation must carry evidential weight apart from an all-purpose escape into unknown divine reasons.

What Would Actually Count as Evidence That God Exists?

A responsible inquiry examines multiple categories of evidence: arguments concerning the universe's existence and intelligibility; fine-tuning; consciousness and moral obligation; religious experience; and historical testimony regarding Jesus. No component should be exaggerated or combined with others without considering dependence among premises. Evidence for generic theism is not automatically evidence for Christianity, while historical evidence for the Resurrection, if compelling, may have implications far beyond abstract metaphysics.

Dr. Richard Swinburne (born 1934), distinguished philosopher of religion and professor emeritus at the University of Oxford, advances what he calls a **cumulative case for God's existence**. In his influential *The Existence of God* (2004), Swinburne argues that the universe's existence, its orderly natural laws, human consciousness, moral awareness, and religious experiences should be evaluated together as evidence for theism. Although individual arguments may fall short of conclusive proof, their combined explanatory force, he contends, can make God's existence more probable than its denial. **The central question is not whether one extraordinary discovery proves God exists, but whether the totality of available evidence is better explained by an intelligent Creator than by competing naturalistic explanations.** (Dr. Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 2nd ed., Oxford University Press, 2004.)

The proper question is which worldview offers the most coherent explanation of the whole body of evidence, including data initially unfavorable to it. Divine hiddenness belongs inside this evaluation, not outside it. A thoughtful Christian should examine whether the observed distribution of nonbelief is more probable under naturalism, and whether the Christian account of revelation and history supplies a sufficiently strong alternative.

The Evidence Before Us: What Does Divine Hiddenness Actually Establish?

Schellenberg's argument is logically formidable if its premises hold. Its central issue is whether perfect divine love necessarily entails that every nonresistant person capable of relationship with God possesses belief at every relevant moment. Christian responses involving freedom, transformation, history, and limited human perspective illuminate possibilities but do not establish a universally agreed resolution. Neither the mere possibility of unknown reasons nor the sincerity of one theological claim settles the dispute.

One essential distinction must remain clear: **the existence of sincere unbelief does not logically establish the nonexistence of God, any more than the presence of unanswered questions automatically establishes His existence.** Divine hiddenness challenges particular expectations about how a perfectly loving God would reveal

Himself, but its ultimate significance depends upon the strength of those expectations and the evidence supporting competing explanations. **The responsible verdict must therefore weigh what remains unexplained against what may already have been revealed through creation, conscience, history, and Jesus Christ.**

Having spent more than four decades in Christian ministry, I cannot conclude this investigation without acknowledging what I have personally witnessed. **I have seen extraordinary answers to prayer—some wonderfully encouraging, others painful or entirely unexpected—that have left an indelible impression upon my understanding of God's presence, providential care, and, at times, even His judgment.** I am not referring to sensationalized claims of limbs miraculously growing back or other spectacular stories that cannot withstand serious examination. Rather, I am speaking of genuine experiences, remarkable circumstances, unexpected interventions, and answers to prayer that, taken together over forty years, I personally can no longer dismiss as mere coincidence. I recognize that these experiences do not constitute independent scientific proof for someone who has not witnessed them, nor do they explain why others have prayed just as sincerely and experienced only silence. **Nevertheless, their cumulative impact upon my own life has been profound: they have strengthened my faith, deepened my confidence in prayer, increased my love for God, and reinforced my conviction that He is neither absent nor indifferent to His creation.**

Dr. Holly Ordway, a literary scholar with a Ph.D. in English literature from the University of Massachusetts Amherst and a former atheist, offers another compelling perspective on the search for God. In her autobiographical work, *Not God's Type: An Atheist Academic Lays Down Her Arms* (2014), Ordway recounts how she once dismissed Christianity as irrational superstition, convinced that the material universe was all that existed. Yet her growing questions about morality, meaning, beauty, and the intellectual foundations of her atheism eventually led her to investigate Christian philosophy, historical evidence, and the Gospels. **Her journey illustrates that God's apparent absence from one's understanding of reality need not be the final verdict.** What she once considered intellectually impossible gradually became, through sustained investigation, a conviction she embraced. For our inquiry into divine hiddenness, her experience offers an important reminder: **the absence of personal certainty today does not necessarily mean that the evidence for God will remain unpersuasive tomorrow.** (Dr. Holly Ordway, *Not God's Type: An Atheist Academic Lays Down Her Arms*, Ignatius Press, 2014; *From Atheist Professor to Catholic: An Interview with Dr. Holly Ordway*, 2016.)

Divine hiddenness may count against some expectations of classical theism without constituting a decisive refutation of every Christian account. Its significance must be weighed with positive philosophical and historical evidence. The strongest Christian position is not that all difficulty has disappeared, but that belief may remain reasonable despite unresolved questions about the timing and distribution of divine disclosure. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Hiddenness of God)

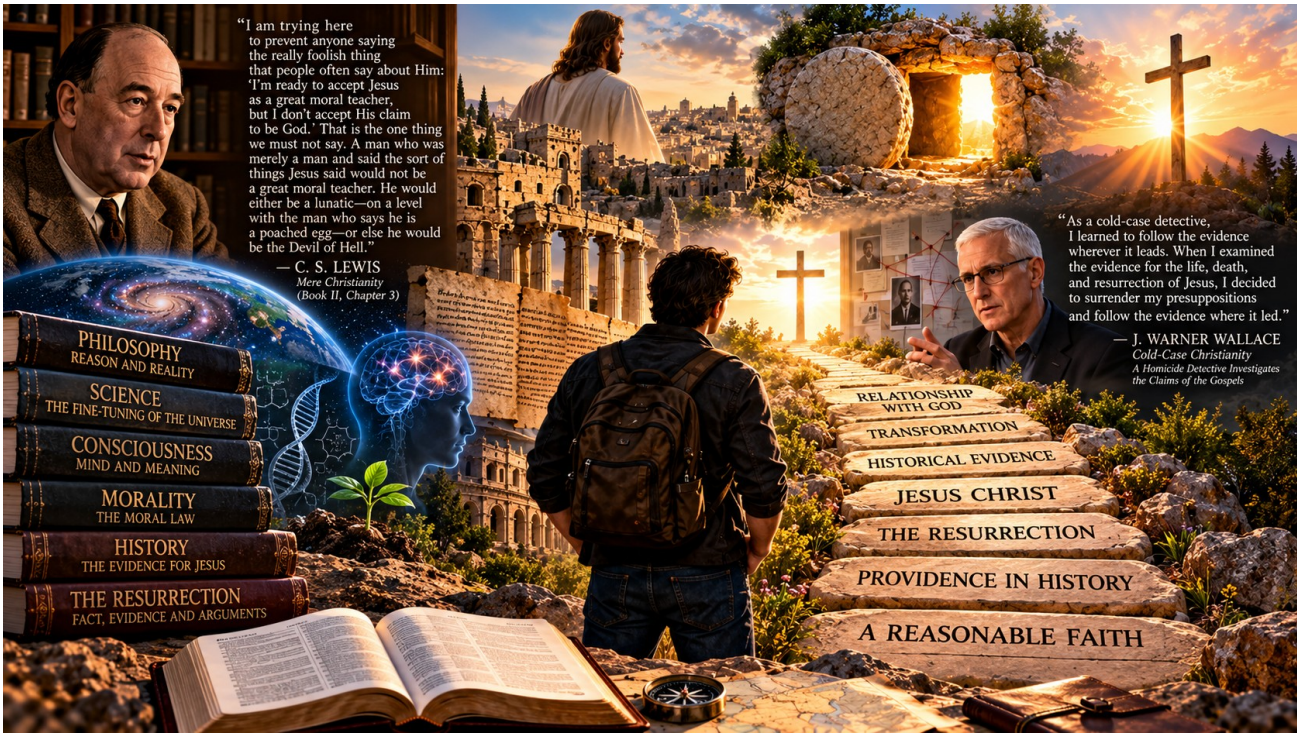
A Former Atheist's Reflection: What Changed My Mind?

Having been raised in an atheist and agnostic household, I understand that disbelief is not always the conclusion of a campaign against God. My assumptions were shaped by family, experience, and intellectual surroundings. Over many years I examined science, religions, philosophical explanations of existence, historical documents, and the identity and Resurrection of Jesus. I became persuaded by a cumulative case, not by a single supposedly irresistible proof.

In some respects, **I was much like Lee Strobel (born 1952)**, the former atheist and award-winning investigative journalist whose search for truth became the foundation of his bestselling book, *The Case for Christ*. Strobel initially set out to challenge Christianity, but after nearly two years examining its historical claims, particularly the Resurrection, he became convinced that the cumulative evidence favored Christian belief. His experience parallels my own journey from atheism to faith, although our

backgrounds and investigations differed. **Neither of us began by accepting Christianity simply because we had been taught to believe it; we had to confront the evidence and reconsider assumptions we once regarded as settled.** As Strobel later explained, his investigation led him to conclude that the evidence for Christianity was too compelling to ignore. (Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ: A Journalist's Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus*; *About Lee Strobel*.)

Four decades of ministry and countless encounters with suffering people have not eliminated every question about God's providence and silence. In some respects they have made the questions more urgent. Yet unresolved difficulties have not erased the reasons that persuaded me Christianity deserves trust. If I benefited from the freedom to investigate faith carefully, I must extend that freedom to others. Truth does not become less true because it is questioned.



The Verdict: Has God Truly Remained Silent?

Divine hiddenness is a substantial philosophical objection, especially when understood as the existence of nonresistant unbelievers. The familiar claim that God must hide to preserve freedom is insufficient by itself, because knowing someone's existence does not compel love. Christians must offer more careful reasoning about moral transformation, history, and the purposes of revelation.

At the same time, the claim that God has provided no evidence overlooks serious inquiry in cosmology, fine-tuning, consciousness, morality, religious experience, and especially the historical claims surrounding Jesus. None should be overstated. Christianity's most distinctive response is that God entered history through Christ; if the Incarnation and Resurrection are true, the question changes from whether God has ever revealed Himself to why His self-disclosure has taken this form and remains differently persuasive to different people.

Again, C. S. Lewis, the distinguished Oxford and Cambridge literary scholar and former atheist, famously challenged the comfortable assumption that Jesus could be admired simply as a great moral teacher while His extraordinary claims to divinity were dismissed. In *Mere Christianity* (1952), Lewis argued that a merely human Jesus making such claims would be either profoundly deluded, **"on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg,"** or deliberately deceptive. His argument, commonly summarized as **"Lord, Liar, or Lunatic,"** presses readers to confront the question of Jesus' identity rather than sidestep it. Although the historical reliability of Jesus' reported claims must first be examined, Lewis's central challenge remains significant for divine hiddenness: **If Jesus genuinely claimed divine authority, and the historical evidence supports those claims, then Christianity presents something far more consequential than speculation about an invisible Creator. It presents the possibility that God has already revealed Himself personally in Jesus Christ.** (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book II, Chapter 3, "The Shocking Alternative", 1952.)

J. Warner Wallace, a former atheist and veteran Southern California homicide detective with more than three decades of law-enforcement experience, approached Christianity with the investigative skepticism he had developed examining cold-case murders. In his book *Cold-Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels*, Wallace applies principles of eyewitness evaluation, corroboration, circumstantial evidence, and historical investigation to the Gospel accounts. Reflecting on his conversion, he writes, **"I decided to surrender my presuppositions and follow the evidence where it led."** Wallace explains that his conclusions emerged gradually as he investigated the claims of the Gospel writers rather than simply accepting religious assertions. His experience reinforces a principle central to this investigation: **God's apparent silence should not prevent us from examining the historical evidence of what He may already have said and done.** Like a cold-case detective reconstructing events from surviving testimony and corroborating circumstances, the sincere seeker must ask whether the accumulated evidence points toward Christianity's claims or toward a more convincing alternative. (J. Warner Wallace, *Abbreviated Christianity and*

Christian Case Making, *Cold-Case Christianity*, June 17, 2016; *Cold-Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels*, David C Cook.)

Perhaps the most important distinction emerging from this investigation is that **sufficient evidence for a reasonable decision about God's existence is not identical with exhaustive knowledge, and intellectual acknowledgment is not identical with love.** Christianity proposes that God has given humanity reasons to believe while inviting a personal response of trust and commitment. It also makes the much greater historical claim that the invisible Creator has revealed His character in Jesus Christ. The question, therefore, is not merely why God has not appeared in an unmistakable heavenly spectacle, but whether the evidence of creation and the testimony concerning the Incarnation and Resurrection provide good grounds for recognizing Him. That claim must be examined alongside the enduring difficulty posed by sincerely receptive people who remain unconvinced.

What remains unresolved matters. Why does one receptive seeker become convinced while another continues in uncertainty? Why are experiences and access to revelation so unevenly distributed? The verdict is not that divine hiddenness creates no difficulty. It is that the difficulty must be weighed alongside the full positive case for Christianity rather than treated as an automatic disproof of God's existence.

The Second Coming: Will Divine Hiddenness Eventually End?

Christianity does not portray present uncertainty as the final state of redeemed human existence. Paul describes current knowledge as partial and anticipates a more complete

apprehension; Revelation portrays God's dwelling with His people in a renewed creation (1 Corinthians 13:9–12; Revelation 21:1–5; Revelation 22:1–5).

The skeptic reasonably asks why a God who will eventually reveal Himself completely does not do so today. The New Testament connects divine patience with the unfolding of redemption and opportunities for repentance (2 Peter 3:8–13), but does not explain every individual interval of uncertainty. The eschatological promise cannot independently prove Christianity; if Christianity's foundation is credible, however, it offers a horizon in which hiddenness is temporary rather than ultimate.

For the Person Who Still Cannot See God: An Invitation to Keep Investigating

If you remain unconvinced, do not pretend otherwise. Honest belief cannot be manufactured by pressure or fear. Begin with the questions you find most important. Examine philosophical arguments about contingency and causation, the scientific debate about fine-tuning, the earliest sources concerning Jesus, and the evidence for and against the Resurrection. Do not mistake the failures of Christians for a demonstration that Christ's historical claims are false; neither accept those claims merely because their promises are emotionally comforting.

You may also offer a simple prayer, not as an experiment guaranteed to produce an extraordinary experience but as an expression of genuine openness: “God, if You exist

and desire to be known, help me recognize what is true. Give me honesty to examine evidence, courage to reconsider assumptions, and willingness to follow truth wherever it leads." No one can promise an audible answer or immediate certainty. But absence of such experiences need not end the investigation.

Final Encouragement: The God Who Has Not Finished Speaking

To every sincere seeker who has wondered whether Heaven is listening, and to every believer who has endured a season when God's presence seemed painfully distant, I would offer this final encouragement: Do not mistake an unanswered question for a permanently closed door. The Christian faith does not ask us to deny doubt, pretend suffering is painless, or manufacture spiritual experiences we have never had. It invites us to continue seeking truth while examining the extraordinary possibility that the Creator of the universe has already reached toward humanity in ways greater than we initially recognized. If the historical claims concerning Jesus Christ are true, then the God who sometimes seems hidden has not remained indifferent, distant, or silent forever. He entered our world, shared our vulnerability, confronted evil, endured death, and rose again with a promise that the present separation between God and humanity will not be the final chapter of history. The questions you carry today may be genuine, difficult, and deeply personal, but they need not extinguish hope. Continue investigating, continue asking, continue seeking, and do not surrender the pursuit of truth merely because every answer has not yet appeared. For Christianity's extraordinary proclamation is that the

God we struggle to see has already made Himself known in Jesus Christ—and one day, according to His promise, the veil of uncertainty will be lifted, faith will give way to sight, and those who belong to Him will discover that the One they sought was never beyond His capacity to know, love, and redeem them. (John 1:14–18; 1 Corinthians 13:12; Revelation 21:1–5.)

🔥 LOOK! What's Coming NEXT TUESDAY in Your Tactical Tuesday Briefing!

Christianity in the Crosshairs — Investigation No. 3

HOW CAN JESUS CHRIST BE THE ONLY WAY TO GOD?

What about the billions of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, atheists, agnostics, and others who sincerely believe something different? And what about those who have NEVER even heard the name of Jesus?

Next Tuesday, **November 3**, we're taking on one of Christianity's most controversial and frequently challenged claims: that Jesus Christ is humanity's only way to God.

Jesus Himself declared, **"I am the Way and the Truth and the lLife. No one comes to the Father except through Me"** (John 14:6).

But that extraordinary statement raises some enormous questions:

- **What about the billions born into other religions?** Does birthplace determine someone's eternal destiny?
- **Is it fair for God to judge those who never had a meaningful opportunity to hear the Gospel?**
- **Can Christianity's claim to exclusive truth withstand serious historical, philosophical, and theological scrutiny?**
- **How can a perfectly loving and just God offer salvation through only one Savior?**
- **And what did Jesus and His apostles actually teach about salvation, accountability, and God's judgment?**

As a former atheist who spent years investigating the world's major religions, their sacred writings, and the extraordinary claims of their founders, **I know how difficult—and how consequential—these questions can be.**

Next Tuesday, we'll follow the evidence, examine the objections, and confront a question with implications reaching far beyond religious preference—perhaps even into eternity.

Don't miss **Investigation No. 3** in our *Christianity in the Crosshairs* series. Invite a skeptical friend, share it with someone searching for answers, and stay tuned for another in-depth investigation that may challenge what you thought you knew about Jesus, salvation, and the justice of God.

The questions are difficult. The answers matter. And the investigation continues NEXT TUESDAY!

www.CrossFireUSA.org

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