

One possible reason why God doesn't just show Himself and be done with it?

Abstract: While witnessing to a friend at work and showing him the historical evidence for the existence of Jesus and the case for the resurrection of Jesus, he asked me this question: Why is it that we have to work to prove that Jesus existed, why is it that there is even any doubt that He died and rose again? Why doesn't God just show up on the scene in a blaze of Glory, show everybody that He exists and show us that Jesus is His son and then be done with it? Or why didn't God make it painfully obvious to us all that Jesus died and irrefutably rose again? Why is there any faith involved?

This was an excellent question and sent me on a quest. As a result I spent many hours talking to people and discussing this issue. The list included a few close atheist friends of mine and in particular a very pleasant and exceedingly intelligent atheist who I met on line named Adam. This essay attempts to study and perhaps provide one possible answer to this great question.

Introduction

In a recent debate Michael Newdow (a recently on the news atheist who is attempting to remove God from the Pledge of Allegiance) asked: **Why doesn't God just show Himself and be done with it?**

Newdow followed this line of reasoning in the debate with his opponent:

1. Do you believe in God? **Ans:** Yes
2. Do you believe that God answers prayer? **Ans:** Yes
3. In that case: Pray now that God shows himself.

Newdow waits in silence for a few seconds then says: Whoops, where is he? Ah, if he doesn't show up he mustn't exist.

Well how do we respond to this?

It turns out that Newdow has made a classic blunder here. Here are the points:

- a. Since we believe there is a God we can assume that he is a supremely intelligent and self-sufficient being and in fact the supreme Ego.
- b. Secondly while we do believe that God answers prayer, we don't believe that he answers ALL prayers with a "Yes."
- c. Given that we believe in God and that He may be willing to answer our prayer (to show up). Why then does Mr. Newdow automatically assume that I the Christian just silently prayed that he would show himself – he is assuming that I wanted to pray for God to show up? What if I didn't pray for God to show up, what if I had instead prayed for God to strike Mr. Newdow blind? (OK this is a sort of cop out, but it sets the stage for the next answer, which relates to the will.) You see besides **my will** playing a part, obviously we believe that God also has his own WILL and **would not** strike Mr. Newdow blind just on my command.

You see what Mr. Newdow has forgotten here is what every Star Trek fan knows by heart. When Mr. Spock was asked why Space Lab Space Regula One did not respond to their calls, Mr. Spock very logically said:

*There are two possibilities sir, they are **unwilling** to respond, or they are **unable** to respond.*

But you say: This is obvious and quite simple.

And so it is, that is both logically simple and obvious. So given that there is a supreme intelligent and self-sufficient being, is it possible that even had I prayed for something, what is the likelihood that he would do just exactly what I asked him to do? Why does Newdow fall into the fallacy of thinking that God is that different from the denizens of Space Regula One (whom he presumably created)? Sure it may be that he is unable to respond. But perhaps he is *UNWILLING* to respond. It would depend on the motivation for God to do that thing.

So extend that to my asking God to show up or to blind you. So just because *you* asked me to, would he show himself? Hopefully by now we all realize that it is **not** a forgone conclusion that just because he doesn't show himself, that he does not exist.

To beat this to death: If you were sitting in a darkened room and I couldn't see you and called out your name. Just because you didn't respond to me does not automatically mean that you aren't in the room. This is quite obvious.

So the real question Newdow needs to ask is: Given that God didn't answer, if He exists, **why** is it that he didn't answer? His previous exercise proved nothing except that God if he exists is no slave of any man and that we don't know why he didn't answer. It's just as valid a conclusion as "God does not exist." You see Newdow and many atheists and in fact many of the Christians assume that God *wants* to show himself to Newdow. But what if God wanted to show himself to everyone BUT Newdow? We shouldn't merely toss that option out without investigating it. While we should pray that God shows himself to Newdow, it may not be God's will (this will become more poignant as we go through this exercise)¹.

Now all this is obviously not a proof of God's existence either. As a Christian it gets me nowhere, (assuming I am trying to prove God does indeed exist). It is merely a standoff with neither side proving anything in particular at all. Newdow's opponent Cliffe, in the above debate rightfully didn't appeal to this, he validly appealed to the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. Unfortunately he didn't press this point and show Newdow's real weakness... as we ended up seeing from the debate, Newdow was ignorant of History and the historical methods of determining accuracy of documents. (While we don't have time for that, in brief: Newdow said: How can we trust the words of something someone wrote 2000 years ago.... For an answer to that see my papers on the "Historical Evidence for the Resurrection" and "Why we can trust the Bible", the short answer however is that it's obviously unimportant how LONG ago something was written, it's important on how long AFTER the event it was written. Confused? Well if 2000 years from now what if some yahoo was to say: Well Hitler didn't exist, because everything we know about him was written 2000 years ago. What logic would that make? What's important is not when we read it, but how long after Hitler's existence was the document about him written originally – this merely shows another flaw in Newdow's logic and his ability to process information. All the evidence in the case of the Resurrection accounts of Jesus is that they were written within 20-30 years of his "alleged" resurrection, far before any myths could have arisen and during the lifespan of the actual witnesses).

¹ My friend Kevin Vannorsdel made a great comment about this whole concept and how we assume that God is there for us, and not that we are there for God. "I wonder if those in ancient days believed there was a King – they maybe never saw him, and he didn't answer their every request but they knew darn well that he existed."

OK back to the matter at hand. First do note that **this** essay does not attempt to prove that God exists, just that if He did exist there may be valid reasons for why He doesn't show Himself and be done with it.

So this brings us to what I think the real reason behind it all is. Naturally I may be wrong, but I hope to present sufficient logic behind my reasoning. Also do note that my answers may not satisfy some atheists because it violates many of the basic premises that they have. But it should not violate any logic.

Why doesn't God just show himself and be done with it.

Many people have suggested that God doesn't show himself because he doesn't want to violate our freewill. First of all I have to say I think this is a silly reason. God violates our freewill all the time. He violated Paul's freewill when he showed himself to him while note you that Paul was on his way to kill Christians. He violated Mary's freewill when he told her she was going to be pregnant with Jesus, after all he never asked her. He violates our freewill in a sense by creating us, in that we never asked to be born or created. He violated Pharaoh's freewill when he hardened Pharaoh's heart and so on. Besides, I don't understand why is it a violation of someone's freewill to show them the truth and let them pick. Does a Doctor violate your freewill when he shows you the X-ray of your broken bone and tells you about a cast? You could still choose not to get a cast. And finally since I my theology is more Reformed, I believe the Bible says we have a freewill to sin or choose God but do not choose God because it is not in us to do so (Ps 14:2-3, Ps 53:2-3 & Rom 3:10-18). I believe that the Bible shows that on our own none of us would pick God and so He violates our freewill to save us from our own stupidity (that is what happens when the Holy Spirit convicts us). So there has to be a better reason than that, at least one that holds up logically.

Well to answer this question I started up a discussion with a few of my online and offline atheist friends. I also looked up atheist websites and did a search for "why doesn't God show himself." One of the most articulate websites was hosted by a very intelligent individual named Adam. Adam is an atheist and like most of my atheist friends, a very nice pleasant person. He'd written an essay called "One more burning bush." Basically asking why God didn't give us one more document-able burning bush. It was well written and asked some very valid questions. I wrote him and complimented him on his excellent writing and he wrote back (saying that I was the first Christian not to write and tell him that he was going to HELL). So we started a dialog. I told him I was looking for the very answer to this question but as a Christian. We bantered a few ideas back and forth. Finally I asked him this question: A burning bush can be forged by some clever tricks. So obviously a burning bush would not be sufficient for you. What you really want is either
(a) some undisputable supernatural and non-accidental or non-coincidental event or
(b) a revelational physical experience with God (like Paul)
to convince you that he exists. He agreed.

I then said: well item (a) above (the supernatural event) is problematic because any sufficiently advanced technology could be seen as a supernatural event (e.g. flying today would have been seen as magic 2000 years ago – see my paper on “Is the Supernatural Possible”
http://www.acns.com/~nmammen/writings/the_supernatural.htm). So unless you could also prove that

this event would never be scientifically feasible you could always explain it away as some trick or some superior technology².

The second option was also problematic but solvable in that it could be a vision or a hallucination. The way to solve this was to have some sort of physical evidence that remained after the experience and for more than one person to experience it (of course you can never satisfy the nihilist who says that we are but a dream in the mind of a gnat dreaming about being a dream).

So there was possibly at least one thing (the latter option) that could convince my online atheistic friend Adam that God exists. So why didn't God do that? Why doesn't he allow us to experience him physically the same way Adam and Eve experienced him? Why doesn't he visit us in a cloud like he did the Children of Israel? Why doesn't he part the sea and smite our enemies on a regular basis. We'd and our atheist friends would soon believe in him.

But then I remembered a problem that I'd always wrestled with. It was the problem of Satan and the demons. Let me see if I can explain the dilemma I've always had about Lucifer.

First Satan and the demons all know that God exists. It's not as if they wonder.

Second, Lucifer, used to be the son of the morning. The bright morning star. The very word "lucifer" means shining one (e.g. Luminous One, Lucent etc). Why would someone like this who had experienced God's power, rebel against him? Surely Lucifer can't imagine that he could ever defeat God. After all, Satan is just an angel and God, well He's God. Just the single supreme omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent self-aware being!

I have a trick question I ask sometimes. I ask: Who is the opposite of God? Many times I get the answer: "Satan" (and sometimes "Man"). But the truth is that there is NO opposite of God. It cannot exist. There is nothing as equally powerful but opposite to God. In fact the definition of God logically precludes any other God existing, since then God would not be God (see my essay "Can God create a stone so big that He cannot move it.")

Then I ask who is the opposite of Satan. Sometimes they say: Jesus. Which is not really correct. Now if they've been thinking, I get the right answer, which I believe is Gabriel or Michael. Why? Because these two are leading angels and Satan is a leading but fallen angel – equal and opposite. So now why would an angel who is limited in power and most probably limited by time and space (they are not omnipresent in time and space like God as far as we know), even think that he could defeat God and take over the Universe? How ludicrous! How can you kill an infinite being? You can't. So what does Lucifer think he could accomplish. What is he thinking? He knows he can't defeat God, so why try?

So my Luciferian dilemma was: What in "heaven" motivates Lucifer to rebel?

By now I hope you are a few steps ahead of me and are not wondering why we went off on this tangent. But just in case, let me see if I can tie it all together.

First of all back to my hunt and my discussion with Adam, my online atheist friend. I asked Adam. What would he do if I were able to prove that God really existed using the very same method that he'd asked me to use? That's when Adam wavered. "I'm not sure" he said in effect, "I'll have

² In which case you could argue there is no God but there is some advanced race of beings who evolved before us and is using their new technology on us. But then we are stuck with whether they evolved or whether they were created by some supreme being and we are right back to square one. See my paper on Who is Agent X to discuss the problems atheists have with the "First Cause." <http://www.acns.com/~nmammen/sermon/TheSingularityWhoisAgentX.pdf>

to think about it". This puzzled me, because I thought the answer would be obvious. My answer would be "I would worship God." But Adam wasn't sure. That gave me a glimmer of an idea. I decided to do some more research on other atheist websites.

I then ran into a website by Atheists asking fellow Atheists to respond to some deep questions (almost like an atheistic apologetics site - <http://questioner.www2.50megs.com/Questions.html>). There was one question that caught my interest the most; it was the same question I'd asked Adam:

Here's the question: If it turned out there was a god and that god is not dissimilar to the God of the fundies, would you oppose him, in the certain knowledge that such opposition has no hope of success and that by opposing him, in full knowledge of the consequences, choose unending agony post-mortem as a consequence of what you know to be right? (No getting out of the question by assuming that hell is a place of hedonism. For the purpose of the question, you must assume they are right. - Therion Ware (see question 99 on their site)

Some of them said "I guess I'd have to believe in him".

But here's the staggering fact: **90%** answered the question in very particular way and in doing so I believe they solved my Luciferian dilemma and answered why God doesn't show himself on a daily basis.

They said in effect (this is a summary):

*If I found out that the egotistical Xian maniacal **evil**³ God really existed as depicted in the Bible and was insisting on my obedience to him, I would consider it my **moral** duty to be a thorn in his side and to oppose him at every turn, until he destroyed me.*

And there I believe was my answer.

It is pride and rebellion.

You see the first sin in time was when Lucifer rebelled against God. I postulate it may be because he hated the idea of an all-powerful God that he **had** to bow to. If you recall his first sin was that he wanted to be just like the Most High (Isaiah 14:12-14). He could not find it in himself to bow down and humble himself before God. Yet Lucifer knew and knows that there is no way that he can ever defeat God, in fact he must know that if God were to die (if that were ever possible), then the entire multidimensional Universe (and he) would cease to exist or decay into a multidimensional equivalent of a heat death. But like Herman Melville's Ahab, Lucifer will die vainly trying to kill what he so hates; with Ahab it's the great white whale Moby Dick. With Lucifer it's the great glorious white "throned" God.

"Towards thee I roll, thou all-destroying but unconquering whale; to the last I grapple with thee; from hell's heart I stab at thee; for hate's sake, I spit my last breath at thee⁴."

Sink all coffins and hearses to one common pool and since neither can be mine, let me then tow to pieces, while still chasing thee, though tied to thee, thou damned whale!"

³ It is interesting that they call God evil and ascribe a moral standard that they themselves have created. You see the minute you call something evil, you have to have a standard of Good. Nothing can be evil if nothing is good in comparison. For then the word evil has no meaning. But the word Good similarly has no meaning unless you can define what good is. But to define what good is, you need a standard. And you can't have a standard unless you have a standard giver. If you and I are the standard giver, then why does your standard 'stand' (pun intended) and not mine. We can't also use the "majority" rules standards either, because in that case the majority in America ruled that it was OK to have slaves. Did that make it OK to have slaves in the 1800's? No, it was wrong then and it is wrong now, it just took America some time to realize that it had been wrong all along. The only way to have a standard is to have a standard giver who is uniquely qualified to give the standard. That would be the creator and not mankind. For more on this, refer to Ravi Zacharias and William Lane Craig's writings.

⁴ By the way if this first part sounds familiar to Star Trek fans, it's because Khan said it to Kirk in Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan.
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And Ahab sinks to his death taking all of his crew but one. The difference is that Ahab thought he could indeed kill Moby Dick. Lucifer can surely be under no such illusion. Ahab's intense hate of Moby Dick consumed him and in fact defined him. He would never bow to the whale. But it defined him. Ahab needed the whale to exist. Without the whale, Ahab was nothing; he has no reason to exist, no reason to live. And Ahab *knew* this. The death of Moby Dick would be the death of Ahab. Is this the same of Lucifer? For while we may think that Lucifer wants ultimate power, he wants to be just like the Most High. But surely he knows that the only way he can have power is if God were to die. And if God were to die (not that it is possible), he would die too. Just as if Ahab had survived the whale he would have nothing to live for. He would die as surely as he died with the whale. Thus in the same way Satan is left with the only value that he has, and that is to be the leader in a war of attrition with his enemy, his God. He exists to be a thorn in God's side. He has nothing else. He would die with God and since he invariably knows that he cannot kill God his hate is such that he would rather die trying than give in and bow willingly before the almighty God.

So why doesn't God show himself on a daily basis? Well I would postulate, it is because it will make no difference.

Those who hate him and refuse to bow before him will refuse to bow before him *even more* were they to be constantly in his presence, they would hate him more if he were to show up and remind them more of his glory. And in fact their hate would be greater with God *demanding* they bow before him and worship Him. Because they rebel against the very concept of a God who they must bow to. They hate the idea, they hate the concept. Yet those who love him will love him regardless.

The problem is not always that we don't believe God is there. The problem is that we don't **want** to bow before the God we believe is there. And the rest of the time it's because we hate the God whom we don't believe exists.

In fact if we use the Semi-Pelagian (Freewill) viewpoint, then we can argue that the very presence of a God that you hate, will be more of a turnoff to those who only *partially* hate him. And by being unseen, it gives those people more time and more of a chance for them to turn to him by being given slow and gentle proddings over time.

From the Reform Calvinistic viewpoint, since we all hate God to begin with and no one seeks him on their own, (same verses as before: Ps 14:2-3, Ps 53:2-3 & Rom 3:10-18), and since it is the Holy Spirit that must convict us, God's revealing himself or not revealing himself will not change the entries in the Lamb's Book of life that was written before the foundation of the world. Vessels made for destruction will always hate God; vessels made for mercy will understand Grace only when they see the destruction that they were saved from (Romans 9:22-24).

So in my humble opinion in either case it really makes no difference whether God shows himself or not, the end result may well be the same.⁵ I may be wrong, but it's worth thinking about.

⁵ Another point is that the overpowering presence of a God that you hate would be more of a turn off to those who only partially hate him. By being unseen, it gives those people more time and more of a chance to turn to him by being slow and gentle prods over time.

For example if you had a classmate who was obnoxious. What would happen if he was always in your face? Would you tend to like him more or less?

On the other hand what if you got to know him slowly over time, you see chances are that you'd have a better chance of liking him if you are slowly exposed to him. In the same way if there is a supreme creator, he is indeed going to be overbearing, imagine living with an Emperor of the world. So using the semi-Pelagian viewpoint by giving you lots of time to get to know him, this supreme creator is actually helping you to slowly accept him rather than forcing you to reject him. Of course using the Calvinist viewpoint it makes no difference since you would be predestined.

Perhaps I can ask that you think a bit more about why you (if you are an Atheist) or your friends maybe rejecting God. Is it a pride issue? Is it something deep down inside you that just revolts against the idea of bowing before a supreme being. What right does he have to expect you to obey and love him, JUST because he created you?

If that is your attitude then perhaps the issue is not that you need another burning bush, but like Ahab you have found your whale that defines you and you care not that it leads only to misery and destruction. But if I may - I hope that like Ishmael you survive the encounter and are rescued.

Neil Mammen
Portland OR, 12/31/2002

Appendix:

I have included some wise observations by friends of mine that are quite worth pondering on.

As to why God doesn't show himself, I believe that someday He will and everyone who sees Him will be in awe. Maybe God doesn't show Himself because He is too awesome to be seen. He shows a little of Himself to people who have faith in Him, but I don't think that any human could handle seeing Him completely. Even the creatures around God's throne cover their eyes and can only bow and praise Him (Rev.). God is awesome.

Skye

Neil's note: This is especially applicable because the only true way to know that God exists is to actually see him. This is because any consistently repeatable miracle or supernatural event will by definition stop being a supernatural event (e.g. life, gravity, birth, healing etc) or will be a forgeable event (e.g. a David Copperfield magic trick), so those who are prone to disbelieve God will tend to reject these indications of his existence.

Job had such questions and GOD'S answer to him should give us all something to think about. GOD is not obligated (accountable to man) to show us anything or answer us, most of the time we wouldn't even understand the answer from GOD if we got it, see, we really most of the time want a explanation, not an answer.

Jeffrey

Neil's note: And many times the explanation will not satisfy us. E.g. A 5 year old to mom: Why can't I play with the matches?

Mom: Because you will burn the house down?

5 Year old: No I won't I'll be careful.....

The only beef I have is that it would still be nice for God to show himself a bit more clearly-- "occasionally." At birth, we should get 4 or 5 cards that can be traded in throughout our lifetime for a minute of the Lord's time.

Kevin

Neil's note: I can go for that.