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Would You Say God’s Primary Object Is to Not Be Found?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether God’s primary object is to not be found, how one can say God doesn’t make mistakes if the percentage of Christians in the world is so low, and whether the fact that not everyone will be in Heaven is proof that God doesn’t win every battle.

* Would you say God’s primary object is to not be found?

* If God doesn’t make mistakes, how do you explain the fact that Christians have reached an all-time low percentage of the world’s population?

* If the common belief that God wins every battle were true, then no one would be in Hell.

Transcript

Thank you for joining me, Amy Hall, and Greg Koukl on hashtag STRask. And we're going to start with the question today from Tammy. Okay.

From the perspective of an apologist, even in light of believing, would you say God's primary object is to not be found? Wait a minute. Did you say that do I think that God's objective is to not be found? Yes, that's the question. Well, I'm a little bit surprised because it seems to me just the opposite.

And I don't, I mean, there is a question about the so-called hiddenness of God. I think that's way overplayed personally when people raise the issue. Where is God? I don't see any reason to believe in God.

Where's the evidence? Why is he hiding? Well, he's not hiding. As I've said, frequently making the case for God, his fingerprints are everywhere. And of course, he's an invisible being to us, so it isn't like he's going to show himself, but that doesn't mean he's hiding.

Show himself physically is what I mean, or visibly. Though there are occasions, obviously, in the Old Testament, we have examples of theophanes where God manifests himself in a physical

form, burning bush, or something angel of the Lord, or something like that. But it isn't as if we're bereft of any good reason to believe in God.

And this is why it troubles me, and this isn't the point that Tammy's making, but when atheists bring up things like the flanks, spaghetti monster, as a parallel, you want me to believe in the flying spaghetti monster, or there's an illustration they use about the gardener that you never see, you never see any evidence of, whatever you believe there's a gardener in a field, or something to that effect. It's silly because it's not parallel. Neither of those are parallel.

God clearly wants to be found. In fact, I would argue the claim of scriptures that he can't be missed, and this is primarily in Romans 1. I mean, this is the most famous passage. Now, that which is clear about God is known to them because of what's been made, and then there's a reference to he's made it known inside of them, so there's an external element, and there's an internal witness.

I think that we all have Calvin called it the census divinitatus, the sense of the divine that we all have. Atheism is very, very rare in the world, and because it just seems intuitively we are aware of someone who is the best explanation for the way things are. Now, what that one is like, there are various views about, but that there is something beyond us, or someone beyond us, especially, that is responsible for the world the way it is.

It just seems to be so obvious. That's why I'm mystified by the claim of the God is hidden because he wants to be hidden, he doesn't want to be found. That doesn't make any sense to me.

Am I missing something? No, no. You already hit most of the points that I was going to bring up, but I will say, rather than the problem being that God doesn't want to be found, the problem is that men don't want to find God. That's a great way of putting it aside.

That's the real problem, and this goes to Romans 1, which you were describing, because it says that we suppress the truth in unrighteousness, and it says, as you said, from the creation of the world, we can see that God exists, but we exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and we turned towards things in the world and decided we wanted to worship those things instead and to stay away from God. And it's obvious why. Nobody, as you said, God has revealed, he's revealed his existence through nature and through our conscience, men don't want to be held accountable.

I mean, this is just the truth about fallen human beings, and so we suppress the truth about God. So his existence is revealed to everyone through these general revelations, and his grace is revealed by special revelation so that he can be glorified and known and enjoyed. So the first come with his general revelation that takes away all excuse from human beings, because we're all aware.

As you noted, Greg, look back over time, and you see that all these cultures all over the world have had an awareness of supernatural, and they've created different religions. So there is an

awareness of his existence, but yes, he revealed his grace and his plans by special revelation because he has a purpose in revealing to some, and he wants, and I will say also that we know what God's purpose is because he tells us, in particular, we find a couple of places in Ephesians where he tells us flat out, and he says this is all to the praise of the glory of his grace. So everything he's doing, the way that he's revealed himself to some, and not specially, not in every detail to everyone, but all of this is to highlight his grace, and Ephesians 3.11 says that this was in accordance with the eternal purpose which he carried out in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

So his eternal purpose was to reveal himself through the cross, in particular his grace, through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. So that is his eternal purpose. So Jesus also said something that underscores your first point, and that is that in John chapter 3, the light has come into the world and men love darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

Now, there were actually two prongs of our response here. I just want to point out, I don't want people to miss it. We're not just saying, well, the Bible says, for Christians that should be adequate, but it won't be adequate for non-Christians.

We're not just saying that the Bible says God is evident to everybody. I also made an observation about the rarity of naturalistic, atheistic thinking in the history of the world. Of course, there are bad people who didn't believe in anything transcendent, but in only the material world, it goes all the way back prior to the time of Christ, but nevertheless, that isn't the standard view.

Most people are aware of that. So even our common understanding, apart from special revelation of the world, is that someone's behind us, which is why, by the way, we use phrases like Mother Nature, for good to say, because it appears that there is a person involved in what's been going on. And so we anthropomorphize what we claim to be, time and chance and matter, and just call it Mother Nature, but I think there's a reason that we do that, because our natural instincts is to see inside the touch of the personal on all these things.

So we're making both a biblical case and an unbiblical case that the presence of God is obvious. And I agree with you with the reason that it isn't, by the way, that God is trying to hide from some people and show himself to others. I think there is a sense in which that's the case in the maximal degree regarding grace.

But in terms of his existence, he's not hiding, he's there, he's evident, and people don't see him not because he's hiding himself, obscuring what is obvious to most people, but because people, as you pointed out, don't want to acknowledge that God is there and they owe their allegiance. They're hiding from him. And actually one of the objections in, see, I think it's Romans, Romans 10.

When Paul goes through the objections and he's talking about why do some of the Jews believe in some don't, did God's word fail? And he comes to these objections and one of them is, well, they never heard. And he says, no. And he talks about how Isaiah says, who has believed our

report.

And so the problem is that we have turned against God, not that he hasn't revealed himself. Yeah. He actually, in that passage sites, well, they have.

The word has gone out to all the earth in these sites, what Psalm. I can't remember which one it is. It's one of the earliest ones.

I want to say Psalm 11, but that's played out right. Psalm 19, maybe. You know, the heavens are declaring the glory of God.

Oh, is that eight? Maybe. I don't know. We can just speculate.

I'm sure this is fascinating podcast material. Okay. Let's go on to a question from David.

Oh, sorry. Sorry. From Raymond.

God does not and cannot make mistakes, wouldn't we say Christians have reached an all time low percentage of the world's population. Now less than three and 10. Is this what chosen ones meant? Is this what chosen once? Chosen ones meant.

I guess I'm not sure I understand the question. I'm not surprised about the numbers because there are false religions. They're competing concepts.

They can all be true. Many are appealing because they are high in individual freedom alone. Human responsibility.

Others are appealing because they're higher on human responsibility and people take pride in trying to work their way to heaven. Whatever. So the idea of grace and trusting God to save us rather than us saving ourselves in some way.

Well, that we understand the appeal of that because it's so freeing, but I think that's hard for fallen men to grasp. So I'm not surprising, surprised that the numbers are the way they are. I never trusted the Christianity is the largest religion in the world.

When you look at the numbers, that may be true, but that doesn't mean much. It just shows that the influence of Christianity and a broad Christendom has expanded. It doesn't mean that these are people, though they self-identify as Christians, that no Christ.

And everybody who's just marginally reflective on the nature of this question can see that. People are saying, there's so many hypocrites in the church. Oh, yeah.

There's so many people who say they're Christians, they don't act like it. Yeah. There's so much wheat and chaff in the church.

Plenty of chaff. I mean, this is a no-brainer, obviously. Scripture makes this clear and it's obvious to other people.

I don't know, I guess I'm not sure I understand where the question is. My guess is this is a question about God, I'm trying to, the next question is a similar question. So maybe we can go on to that.

But I just want to say here, because the question is God does not cannot make mistakes. It's almost as if they're saying if God were really true, then there would be way more Christians. Yeah, I don't know why that follows at all.

I agree. All you have to do is look through the entire Bible and you can see that this hasn't been the way he's worked. In fact, we talked about in a previous episode not too long ago, why did God choose the Jews? And it wasn't because they were the greatest, either morally or in might and numbers.

And the answer is, if you look through the Bible, you see that God often uses a small number of people because he wants to reveal his own power and glory, working through people that shouldn't be able to accomplish what they're accomplishing so that God's strength and glory and might show through. And people don't say, oh, it's because they were great. God doesn't want to give us the credit for what he's doing because then we wouldn't see him for who he is.

And that would be our loss, ultimately. So he's always worked that way. And it's no surprise that he's still working that way.

And there might be a sense that if Christianity is true and God is powerful and he chooses, why are there so few that are believers? Why doesn't he choose more? I don't know. This is one of those why questions that you can't answer, but there is sometimes a mistake in thinking because it's not adequate to make this assessment by looking at any particular slice of history. What you have to do, and we can't do this now because we don't have the capability of doing that, but you have to be able to raise that issue.

You have to know when all the dust settles, what do the numbers look like? And it could very well be, and certainly on some takes of eschatology, that there is going to be an enormous turning to Christ towards the end. And if there's an enormous turning to Christ towards the end, and this is when the population of the world is the largest, there's a huge harvest that's going to come in. Now, I'm not predicting any of that.

I'm just saying that's an indication or an implication, maybe, of some scriptural teaching regarding the end times, but what I am saying is we can't assess the success of the message by looking at numbers at any slice of history because the real picture is the total picture, and that's going to be the numbers at the end of history. Does that make sense? Yes. And I also will say that if you want to look at evidence of God working, forget the numbers.

Look at what God has done through those numbers. Again, this is what he does in the Old Testament over and over. Look at what he did through Israel.

He created this whole system of laws that revolutionized all of society and added all of these just laws, and without getting into the objections people have particular ones, you just have to look at the difference between that nation and how they view God and justice and other nations, and you see that the respect for human dignity is completely different in the laws of the Israelites. So you see that that very small group of people, all of the areas of the world that have been affected by the Old Testament law and the New Testament gospel in particular, you can see what's happened. People have studied this.

They've looked at how nations that had missionaries who cared about the Bible, what has happened to them and their increase in literacy and hospitals and schools and all of these different things grew out of this whole worldview and God working through his people. So when you look at what God has done through that and how he has shaped the world, I think that's a better measure of God working than mere numbers. Yes, I agree with him entirely.

Okay, here's a question. This is very related. This one comes from David.

It is a common belief that God wins every battle, but how can this be so? If every battle was won by God, no one would be in hell. God loves everyone and wants everyone in heaven. So everyone in hell is a lost battle by God.

Since more in hell than heaven, God lost more than he won. Well, I don't know about that last statement. We don't know how many and that was a point we were just making, but this is a challenging issue, I think, because it goes back to this foundational conundrum if God in a certain sense, and I think we need to qualify it that way because the scripture does, wants people to be saved.

Okay. And I think the best evidence for that is the first Timothy passage, chapter two, not the second Peter passage, that's, I think that's talking about something else who all desires all to be saved and, I don't know, I'm trying to remember how it says a nun to perish, but God is not going to, anyway, but, but I, okay, I want to acknowledge that there is at least at some level God desiring for people to be saved, all right. Now, whether he is going to secure that desire in every case is another question.

And, I mean, our conviction is that in some cases he does, he secures that. However, why not everyone? And then this raises questions about God's eternal purpose and what it means for God to be glorified. And that's some, our punish, however many we don't know in terms of a proportion of the whole.

This seems to be clear in the scriptural statements that this is the backdrop of the grace of God and the mercy of God. It's the justice of God, which is the bad news that helps us to understand

the magnificence of the good news of the grace and mercy of God. There's a backdrop there.

And that's not the way I would put it together, but that's the way the scripture talks about it. So we have to factor in in an answer to this question why some not all that there is a sense in which God is glorified even in the punishment of evildoers, even in the justice that is displayed because his goodness is on display, even in those circumstances. No, these are hard sayings, I think, and it's hard to parse this all out.

And this is why I don't know how to parse it out in a way that's going to be satisfactory to everybody. But these are points that the text does bring up. And there is a whole this element of the mystery of God's intentions that he hasn't made abundantly clear to us, maybe abundantly isn't the right word, he hasn't made clear to us in a granular detailed way.

Oh, here, here it is, Greg. Here's the deal. Let me explain every single piece of the enterprise.

No, we don't have that, but we have some. And it's a fair question to raise, but not being able to answer that question. I don't see how that brings into question any other teaching of scripture, the reality of God, or his goodness or his justice, just because we cannot resolve that issue in our own mind.

You can't know if God has failed unless you first know what his goal is. And so there are some assumptions here that God's highest goal is that every single person be in heaven, I have no doubt that if that were God's highest goal, that would happen. I don't think that's God's highest goal.

And you've mentioned a lot of this already, and we've talked about this on the show before. And I can give you a couple examples in the Bible that give examples of other goals that God has. This one's from Romans 9, what if God willing to demonstrate his wrath and to make his power known endured with much patience, vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.

And he did so to make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he prepared beforehand for glory. So there's a sense in which his wrath is revealing his glory to those he wants to reveal his glory to. By contrast to his mercy, it's the comparison or the contrast that is a view here, right? Right.

And this whole section right here is talking, this goes back to the question, why are some Jews believing and not all Jews are believing? Did God's word fail? And then Paul goes to this whole explanation of why not all Jews are believing and God's word still isn't failing. So this is actually addressing this same kind of question, 9 through 11. And at the very end of this section, what he says is that God has shut them up under disobedience, the Jews, so that he could show mercy to the Gentiles so that now because of this mercy, God will eventually show mercy to the Jews.

So he shut up all under disobedience so that he can show mercy to all. So all of this is carefully

orchestrated to reveal again, to reveal God's grace. And this is God has created this entire story of history to reveal the glory of his grace.

And this involves sometimes people believing and sometimes people not believing. That is his greatest goal. And that shows up here in Romans also.

So again, if you think God's goal is one thing that it isn't, and you're judging everything he's doing by that goal, it's going to look like he failed. That's right. Because he can only have one greatest goal.

This reminds me of like in the Jesus movement, the question was maybe what does Jesus work? Does he really work? I've tried him and didn't work. Well, it all depends on what you expect Jesus to do and your expectations about what you think Jesus is meant to do, has to match up what he intended to accomplish. And that's where you need to start.

That's your point. And I don't blame David and Raymond for not knowing what God's goal is. I don't think, I mean, it's not even clear to me that they're Christians, but even Christians, I think have not read their Bibles enough to know what the bigger goal is.

And this is why I encourage people to read the whole Bible and to get a better sense of what God is doing overall. Because the more you see of that, the more you'll be forced to think through these questions and find answers that fit with all the parts of the Bible, not just your idea of the Bible or maybe a few verses here and there. That's called balance when you have a view that fits with all of the revelation, right? So thank you so much for your questions.

We really appreciate hearing from you, Tammy and Raymond and David. And we'd love to hear from you. So please send us your question on