***God Hides Himself - CA-005***

We have been looking at apologetics, or how to make a reasonable defense of the Christian faith. This is pre-evangelistic. Sometimes if you give the gospel to someone, they don't even have any frame of reference. So apologetics provides a frame of reference so that a person can have a fair view of the Bible.

In the last session, we considered how to answer the question that someone may ask you some day, in all sincerity, "How do we even know that there is a God? The philosopher Bertrand Russell denied that there was a God. He called himself an atheist. In fact, he wrote a book entitled Why I Am Not a Christian. Someone asked Bertrand Russell, "What will you do if you die; you go into eternity; you find that you've been wrong; and, you find yourself face-to-face with God." His answer was, "I will just tell God that I didn't believe in Him because he did not give me sufficient evidence of His existence."

Well, every human being does have sufficient evidence for the existence of God. It is reasonable to believe in God. In the last session, we saw that, although we can't prove scientifically that the God of the Bible exists, we can show people that (as I heard someone say once) the universe is guilty of harboring a Creator.

Let's review briefly the proofs or arguments for the existence of God that we looked at in the last session.

**Arguments for the Existence of God**

1. **The Cosmological Argument**

First of all, there's the cosmological argument, and that just means that everything has a cause. So the universe must have been caused by someone. Everything has a cause except God. He is uncaused. He is the uncaused first cause. We looked briefly at what scientists call the anthropic principle. That means that there is not one shred of evidence that there is life on any other planet in all the universe, and all of the galaxies. There has not been presented one shred of credible evidence that there's any kind of life, but human beings exist on the earth. If you look at it with an open mind, if you're an unbeliever, it certainly looks like it was planned this way. So that's the cosmological argument.

1. **The Teleological Argument**

The teleological argument is that there the universe appears to be designed by an intelligent designer. Things seem to keep rolling along like a very intelligent person planned them to.

1. **The Moral Argument**

Then there's what we call the moral argument. That is that there has never been a society that doesn't have a moral belief – a set of morals. Their moral morals may be perverted, but everyone has always believed in right and wrong. There is a sense of oughtness in the human mind. We push that a little further to what philosophers call the axiological argument that values, not only moral values, but values such as standards of art and music may be relative, but they're relative to what? Values mean nothing unless there's some absolute to compare them to. So the fact that human beings have a sense of morality; a sense of right and wrong; a sense of beauty; the ability to appreciate aesthetics; and, values to judge things by (to judge art and music) point to an absolute.

1. **The Anthropological Argument**

Then there's the anthropological argument that human beings exist. Human beings have a religious impulse. Human beings, the Bible tells us, are created in the image of God. Scientists say that human beings are totally different from animals. We can think abstractly, and the gift of speech that human beings have constitute the anthropological argument – that human beings are intelligent; abstract thinkers; and, have a religious impulse. Every society, again, has had some kind of religion. The only so-called atheistic societies have been the modern communist states, which when you talk to people privately who've been brought up under those circumstances, they'll tell you, "I've always felt there was someone out there."

1. **The Ontological Argument**

There is the ontological argument, and there are several different forms of this. We looked at one, and that is that you may say, "Yes, there is a possibility that the God of the Bible exists there. I agree. I admit that the question of God may be valid. There may be a God." Once you have admitted that, you have admitted the existence of a necessary being. And if you admit a necessary being, then you can't not believe in the necessary being, and that being is God.

1. **The Existential Argument**

Then there's the existential proof or argument. That is that our very existence cries out for meaning. Without God, there is no meaning. There's something drastically unfair that human beings feel in life itself if there is no God.

1. **The Miracle Argument**

Then there are mysterious things such as reports of miracles that cannot be explained without God existing.

1. **The Rationality Argument**

Then there's the argument for rationality. If we believe that there's reason and order and rationality, then we have to believe in God, because if we use our rational minds, and use reason and logic to prove that there is no logical, reasonable, rational Creator, then we've used it illegitimately. So since human beings are reasonable and rational creatures, not that we always act like it, or not that we always use our rationality, but we are capable of using it, then that is a strong argument for the existence of God.

So far, these are so-called secular proofs.

1. **The Bible**

Then we need to introduce to other strong arguments for the existence of God. That is the very existence of the Bible since so many people throughout history have tried to work it out – the power of the Bible in changing people, and fulfilling prophecy.

1. **The Lord Jesus Christ**

Then, of course, there is the Lord Jesus Christ.

So these are basically the proofs that philosophers used for the existence of God. Someone may ask you the question, "Just how do you know there is a God? Why do you even believe in God?" This is a good place to start. Some Christian apologists hold these proofs or arguments in contempt. One point they make is that when we're using these with unbelievers, we are proving the existence of the Christian God without using anything Christian. That's why I introduced the last two proofs. As soon as you can, get people to the Bible and to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. But it's a valid point to say that when we're using these proofs, and we don't use the last two with unbelievers, we're playing their game with their ball on their court, and they're making the rules. I think that's a valid point.

However, I think the proofs do have some validity, even though if you go through these first proofs without the last two, you are talking about the Christian God without having introduced anything Christian. You're playing by their rules, but you never know when the Holy Spirit is going to use one of these. This may be just what that person needs to get their mind turned in the direction of theism. Theism means the belief in a god.

Remember that C.S. Lewis was led to become a Christian by thinking about rationality, and he didn't believe that there was a Creator. But he got to thinking about all the rational arguments that he gave for God not existing. Then he said, "Now, wait a minute, this is wrong. I'm using my reason to prove that nothing is reasonable. I'm using my rationality to prove that there is no rational being who gave me my rationality to begin with."

I told you about Brother Lawrence who wrote a book called Practicing the Presence of God. He was led to thinking about spiritual things and becoming a believer by thinking about teleology – intelligent design, and how nature is obviously planned. There are laws of nature, and if there are laws, then this points to a lawgiver.

So I wouldn't reject these proofs. It would be a good place to start with an unbeliever. But get to the Bible, and get to the Lord Jesus Christ as soon as you can. Get them to reading the Bible and reading about the Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament, and considering His claims.

It's not a good idea to just dwell on propositional truth, knowing *about* God. Encourage a person to become acquainted *with* God personally. Personal knowledge is different from propositional knowledge.

We're going to answer the question that Bertrand Russell inadvertently raised when he said there was not enough evidence for the existence of God. Why isn't God more obvious? Why doesn't God just give us some kind of proof or some kind of scientific proof that we can take into a laboratory and pour into a test tube and say, "Here is 100% proof that the God who revealed Himself in the Bible exists?"

**God Hides Himself**

First of all, before we attempt to answer that question, let me say that God does at times hide Himself. Isaiah 45:15: "Truly, thou art a God who hides Himself, O God of Israel, My Savior." So the Word of God says that, "Yes, one of God's characteristics is that He is not completely obvious. He does hide Himself."

**Disobedience**

One of the reasons God hides Himself is because of human disobedience.

I'm going to be talking about both unbelievers and believers, because you can get so out of fellowship and so callused that you can actually wonder, "Well is there even a God? Was this Christianity stuff all wrong that I used to think I believed in?" So one reason for that is disobedience to God. In Deuteronomy 31:16, Moses is getting ready to check out and go be with God: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Behold, you are ready to lie down with your fathers, and this people will arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of the land, into the midst of which they are going, and will forsake Me and break My covenant, which I have made with them. Then My anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and hide My face from them, and they shall be consumed, and many evils and troubles will come upon them so that they will say in that day, 'Is it not because our God is not among us that these evils have come upon us?''"

So God hides Himself sometimes from His own people because of outright disobedience. Isaiah 59:1: "Behold, the Lord's hand is not so short that it cannot save. Neither is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear." And so if you know someone or if you meet someone who says, "Well, I used to be a Christian, but I don't even believe in God now," this could very well be what has happened. They're still born again, but they've gotten out of fellowship and they've calloused their soul, so they don't sense the presence of God, because God is hiding Himself from them.

Micah 3:4: "Then they will cry out to the Lord but He will not answer them. Instead, He will hide His face from them at that time, because they have practiced evil deeds." So outright disobedience to God can cause God to hide from a person.

**Negative Volition**

Then negative volition is a related activity that will cause God to hide Himself from a human being. You won't sense His presence. You'll even doubt whether He's out there or not. A person, either an unbeliever or someone who has been born again can actually deny that God exists because of their practiced, persistent, negative volition – just saying, "No" to God. In Isaiah 65:2, God is quoted as saying, "I have spread out my hands all day long to a rebellious people who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts."

Then Jesus used a couple of examples. In Luke 19:41: "When he approached, He saw the city Jerusalem and wept over it, saying, 'If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace, but now they have been hidden from your eyes. For the day shall come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you and surround you, and hem you in on every side, and will level you to the ground, and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.'" Jesus was there in the flesh in Jerusalem, and the majority of the people rejected Him. So He wept because of what He knew was going to happen to Jerusalem because of their negative volition.

Then in Luke 13:34, He said, "Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills prophets, and stones those sent to her. How often have I wanted to gather your children together just as the hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it?"

So Jesus longed to be recognized and worshiped by the people of Jerusalem, and He longed to have fellowship with them, and they rejected that – negative volition. Speaking of negative volition, when the philosopher, Nietzsche, an atheistic philosopher, was a young boy, he was a professing Christian. He wrote some beautiful religious Christian poetry, and professed to be a believing Christian. But as a bitter old man, he wrote books of philosophy saying that there is no God. Someone once ask him (again, this seems to be a favorite question to ask atheists, and is a good one to ask them), "What will you do if you find that you've been wrong – that there is a God?" Someone asked Nietzsche, "What would you do and say if I could prove to you beyond a doubt that God exists?" And Nietzsche said, "I would disbelieve Him all the much more." Now that, friends, is negative volition. And sometimes when negative volition gets started, the callouses on the human soul feed off of each other, and it has to run its course.

So let's turn over to Psalm 10:1. Sometimes it seems that God is hiding Himself from His born again family members. Sometimes we don't sense the presence of God. We feel that our prayers don't go any higher than the ceiling. We examine ourselves, and as far as we can tell, there are no sins to confess and there is no disobedience. But still, it seems that God is not there. We don't have the fellowship with Him that we have had and that we would want to have. Psalms 10:1 says, "Why do You stand so far off, O Lord? Why do You hide Yourself in time of trouble?" That seems to be sometimes when we feel like we most need a sense of God's presence – when it isn't there. So sometimes God hides Himself, apparently, from His own children.

Psalm 30:7: "Oh, Lord, by your favor, you have made my mountain to stand strong. You hid Your face, and I was dismayed." So there are times when we just feel like God is so real we can almost reach out and touch Him. At other times, He seems a million miles away, and to the best of our knowledge, there's no disobedience and no sin that we're harboring. We have to say that God is hiding Himself.

Psalm 104:27: "They all wait for You to give them their food in due season. You give it to them. They gather it up. You hide Your face, and they are dismayed. You take away their spirit; they expire; and, return to the dust."

The one thing we can say when God hides Himself from His children is that it has value. It is for our good. I think there are probably two reasons that He does this. One reason is that we value the things that we are denied. And if we just wake up every morning, and we sense God's presence in an overwhelming way, we'll grow to where we don't appreciate that until He hides His face for a while. We do everything that we can do, and we still don't sense God's presence. Boy, believe me, when we sense it again, we're going to really value it and esteem it. We know how to appreciate it then. So sometimes God withdraws a sense of His presence. He's still there. As Jacob said, "Behold, God is in this place, and I knew it not." He's still there. He's still indwelling us. He's faithful. He's never going to leave us. But He withdraws a sense of His presence. We can say, as the psalmist did, He hides Himself so that we will learn to esteem and value a consciousness of His presence more and more.

**God Wants Us to Seek Him**

Then another reason that I believe that He hides Himself from us is that He wants us to seek a sense of His presence. He wants us to seek Him, and to make sure that there's nothing that we're doing that's displeasing to Him. He wants us to bury ourselves in His Word, and to spend time in prayer seeking a sense of His presence. He wants to encourage us to seek Him. He doesn't want to be the one to always seek us. He wants us to seek His attention. So I believe that sometimes He hides His face from us, but it has value in it. He is teaching us something by doing so.

The Bible is very clear that God is not hiding somewhere (though He may appear to be sometimes) while people seek after Him, and then He hides again when they're getting warm because He doesn't want to reveal Himself to people. First of all, if anyone truly is seeking to learn something about God, it is because God is drawing them to Himself through the person of the Holy Spirit. Secondly, God sincerely desires to have fellowship with us. God is a communicator, and He loves to communicate to His people. He sincerely desires our fellowship. 2 Peter 3:9: "The Lord is not slow concerning His promise as you count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance."

The same thought is expressed in 1 Timothy 2:3-4. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God, our Savior, who desires all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." So it is God's desire for every human being to know Him in a personal way, and to have fellowship with Him, and to have eternal life. John 3:16 tells us that, "God loved the people of the world so much that he sent His Only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

In John 15:14, Jesus said to the believers, "You are my friends, if you do what I command you to. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you." So Jesus is saying, "I want to take you believers into My confidence. I want you to know everything that I know."

We began with the question, "Why doesn't God make Himself just so obvious that you couldn't deny His existence?" So the question is, "Why doesn't God make Himself more obvious?" And we've looked at how God does hide Himself because of disobedience (negative relation). Sometimes He hides Himself from believers for our own edification. Another reason, I've heard people say, "If Jesus is really alive today, why doesn't He appear to me? Why won't he do a miracle for me just so I will know that He actually is the Son of God?" We could talk about some really strange experiences that I have heard, mostly from Jewish people, who have prayed prayers like this: "God, if Jesus is your Son, will you cause such-and-such to happen?" I have heard by reliable testimony that a lot of Jewish people have come to know the Savior because of providential miracles in answer to prayer – prayers that they have prayed. But generally, it's not a good thing for someone to lay out a fleece and say, "God, if you exist, prove it to me by doing such-and-such a thing."

The reason is Luke 16:31. They would explain it away. Luke 16:31 says, "If they did not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead." So if your mind set is such that you're going to deny God and deny the truth of the Bible no matter what, then God's not going to bother with you.

In John 12:36-37, Jesus was having a dialog with some of the Jewish people, and they were rejecting Him. Verse 35: "Jesus therefore said to them, 'For a little while longer, the light is among you. Walk while you have the light, that darkness may not overtake you. He who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the light, believe in the light in order that you may become sons of light." So Jesus said, "Look, I'm with you. You better believe in Me now so that you can become the sons of light. Don't play this game, and don't wait, because you may not have the light always."

So what we're talking about is a change in the basic human attitude. 1 Corinthians 1 says that people think they're seeking God in the wrong way. 1 Corinthians 1:21 says, "That since in the wisdom of God, the world, through its wisdom, did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom. For we preach Christ crucified, to Jews the stumbling block, and to gentiles foolishness."

**Arrogance**

When you come to God, you have to come on your own terms, and you don't find God through human wisdom, because the key ingredient of human wisdom is arrogance (1 Peter 5:5). When we're talking about spiritual things, the natural mind (the human mind), without the enlightenment of God the Holy Spirit, is arrogant, and you will never discover God through the way of human wisdom tainted by arrogance. 1 Peter 5:5: "You younger man, likewise, be subject to your elders, and all of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another. For God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Who does God resist? Who does He keep at arm's length? The arrogant – the proud. Who does He want to be friends with? Who is He gracious to? Who does He give special grace? The humble.

James 4:6: "But he gives greater grace. Therefore, it says (the Word of God says), 'God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'" Didn't I just read that? Yeah. Peter said it. Then James said it. When the Word of God thinks something is so important that it needs to be repeated, that's a good clue for us that we better make a note of it. God only has to say something once for it to be true. But when He says something twice, believe me, we had better listen.

In the Old Testament, in Proverbs 6:16, is God's hate list – the things that God hates: "There are six things which the Lord hates. Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: haughty eyes; a lying tongue; hands that shed innocent blood; a heart that devises wicked plans; feet that run rapidly to evil; a false witness who utters lies; and, one who spreads strife among brothers." All of these things that God hates are offshoots of arrogance. In verse 17, "haughty eyes" is outright arrogance.

Then Proverbs 16:5: "Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord. Assuredly he will not be unpunished."

Then in Jeremiah 50:31, Jeremiah says, quoting God, "Behold, I am against you, O arrogant ones." So if you want to get God mad at you, just be proud of who and what you are. Just be arrogant. Be proud of how smart you are.

Psalms 138:6 drives this even closer home: "For though the Lord is exalted, yet He regards the lowly (or the humble), but the haughty (the arrogant) He knows from afar off." God keeps his distance from the arrogant. So if you know someone who says that they would really like to believe in God, but they just can't seem to do that, then you might tell them that maybe it's their mental attitude. Maybe they're trying to seek the assurance of God in their way rather than in His way, which is through the Lord Jesus Christ. We'll get to that in a moment.

You want to get a person into the Word as soon as can. You can show them these Scriptures because that's your goal. You want to get them into the Word as soon as you can. This makes your work as a Christian apologist so much easier. You don't have to do anything. If you can get people into the Bible, then that provides the opportunity for God the Holy Spirit to guide them.

Malachi 3:7: "From the days of your fathers, you have turned aside from My statues and have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of Hosts." So if someone seeks God on His own terms that He has told people to seek Him, then He will seek them. "Return to Me, and I will return to you."

Jeremiah 29:13: "You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart." Of course, we believers know that the way to seek God is through 1 John 1:9 – confession of all known sins.

For the skeptic; the agnostic; the self-styled atheist; or, whatever kind of person it is who is having trouble believing in God, the goal is to get them into the Scriptures (into the Word of God), and especially to reading about and considering the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's not in vain because people can know something about God and know God personally. 1 Corinthians 2:12: "We have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God." So God wants us to be knowledgeable. He has given us His Spirit to teach us for the purpose of our knowing spiritual things.

Romans 8:14-16: "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading you to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out. 'Abba' (Father). The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God; and if children, heirs, also heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified with Him." So God has given us the Holy Spirit for the purposes of our having the assurance that we do have a relationship with God, and that we can be knowledgeable about who we are; where we came from; and, what our destiny is.

1 John 5:20: "We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, and His Son, Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life." So you notice how many times the words "true;" "truth;" "know;" and, "knowledge" are used. God wants us to know Him. He wants us to have knowledge.

The Lord Jesus Christ made some very, almost shocking statements. John 7:4 is in a context of Jesus' earthly brothers. The other children of Mary and Joseph were not believers. They did not believe that their older brother was the Son of God, the Messiah. So they came to Him and they said, "Look, why don't you just go ahead and show everybody that you're the Messiah?" In verse 4, they say, "'No one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world,' for not even His brothers were believing in Him." They said, "Jesus, if you really are the Messiah, why don't you go ahead and show everybody. Go ahead and make it public. Do a bunch of miracles or something." But in verse 6, Jesus therefore said to them, "'My time is not yet at hand. But your time is always opportune. The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it, that its deeds are evil. Go up to the feast yourself. I do not go up to this feast because My time has not yet fully come.' And having said these things to them, He stayed in Galilee.

In other words, He said, "I will publicly announce that I'm the Messiah at the right time. You're not going to tell Me when the right time is. I know, and I'll do it at the right time." But they wanted Him to manifest himself to show people who He was.

Drop down in verse 17, and He's going to talk about manifesting himself: "If any man is willing to do His will (God's will), he shall know of the teaching whether it is of God, or whether I speak for Myself. He who speaks from himself speaks his own glory. But he that is seeking the glory of the one who sent Him, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him." So did you catch that at the first of verse 17? "If any man is willing to do His will, he will know whether My teachings are of God or whether they are of myself." If a human being has a humble attitude, and is sincerely seeking for the truth, then they will know. They will find out whether the claims of Christ are true or not.

I heard someone call this the ultimate test of integrity. If you're really an honest person, and if you're really seeking the truth, then this is the test. You go to God and you say, "What about Christ? Is He your Son or not?" If you're willing to face the truth, and you admit that there may be some things you don't even know, and you're open to truth from God, this is the test. You will know the truth.

Then in John 8:59, Jesus made another astounding statement there. All this conversation had been about Abraham. So Jesus said in verse 50, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." He didn't say, "I was." He said, "I am." With God, there is no past, and no future. It's all in the present: "I am." So liberals read the New Testament and they say, "Well, Jesus never did claim to be God," but the Jews sure got the idea that he was claiming to be God, because in verse 59, they said, "'This is blasphemy,' and therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple."

He also did this in another place. In Mark 14:62, He used the term, "I am," and the same thing happened. He had been asked, "Are you the Christ?" And Jesus said, "I am." Then he went on: "'And you shall see the Son of Man, sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.' And the high priest tore his clothes, and he said, 'What other need have we of witnesses? You've heard the blasphemy.' They all condemned him to be deserving of death. Some began to spit at Him, and to blindfold Him, and to beat Him with his fists, and to say to him, 'Prophesy.' The officers received Him with slaps in the face.'" So Jesus said, "Yes, I am." Then he went on to elaborate, and they said, "This is nothing but pure blasphemy."

They came to arrest Jesus, and they said, "Are you Jesus of Nazareth?" And he said, "'I am.' And they fell to the ground." I love that. There's no elaboration. There's some mystery there. I think what happened is that for a split second, His deity showed through. When He said, "I am," they got a glimpse of His deity and they fell to the ground. But then they arose and went on about with their plans to arrest Him.

Finally, all these Scriptures were building up to this one. John 14:21: "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me, and he who loves Me shall be loved by My father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him." He is saying, "I will manifest Myself to him. I will let this person know Me personally."

"Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, 'Lord, what then has happened that you're going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'If any man loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our abode with him.'"

This is what we need to point unbelievers to – someone who says, "Well, I'm not even sure there is a God." We may introduce them to these proofs. Then as quickly as we can, we get them reading the Word of God about the Son of God. Jesus said, "If any man loves Me (if anyone has a mental attitude of goodwill toward Me)." You're not going to read the New Testament with an open mind very much without having a mental attitude of goodwill toward Jesus. Jesus said, "My Father and I will come and will manifest Ourselves to him."

And so there's a difference in knowing *about* God, which we can do to some extent through observing nature, and through talking about the proofs. We can show people that there is someone out there, and we can lead them to believe in the Christian God. But we can get them to experience Him firsthand by showing them Jesus in the Word of God, and teaching them that they've got to lay aside their mental attitude of arrogance. That is because it is the arrogance in human wisdom that makes God hide Himself.

Leon Adkins, 2003

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