

Is There a Global God You Can Trust?



1. Introduction: Religion seems to divide people ... Is there a real God who can bring people together?

Course Description: You came to this university to prepare for your life's work in a global world. Will career success provide you with meaning and significance in life? Or, do you hope to find the source of happiness in your relationships with people? There are many successful people who are unhappy. There are many intelligent people who experience disappointing relationships throughout their lives.

You may not think that you are a religious person. In fact, you may be an atheist. But you will look to someone, or to something, to give you meaning and happiness. You may hope that your academic success will give you a purpose in life. Do lasting purpose or satisfaction in your life come from God? Many intelligent people turn away from the "God option" because they think religion is false, primitive, superstitious, or the cause of divisions between people.

But, as the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky observed, all humans "must bow down to something." What will you put at the center of your life? You must choose wisely! If you choose a poor substitute for God, that will become your "false hope." The Bible has a technical term for a "God-substitute." Replacements for God are called "idols." They will always disappoint and fail you.

Whether you are from east or west, north or south ... from India, China, Korea, Africa, Turkey, the Americas, or Europe - you share in a universal human search for significance and satisfaction in life. Some people look to religions to solve moral issues, to have mystical experiences, or to find wisdom. Other people look to money, career success, or fame to give their lives meaning.

Each week of this semester, we will identify some false hopes - so that you can be aware of them. Then there is the possibility that you will find a global God you can trust throughout your lifetime.

TO THINK ABOUT

"You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless
until they find peace in You."

A Prayer of Augustine of Hippo, North Africa (354 – 430 A.D.)

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Insights from the Bible:

Ecclesiastes 1:12 I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³ I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven ... ¹⁴ I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind. ¹⁶ I thought to myself, "Look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge." ¹⁷ Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind. ¹⁸ For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief ...

^{2:1} I thought in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good." But that also proved to be meaningless. ² "Laughter," I said, "is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?" ³ I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.

⁴ I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. ⁵ I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. ⁶ I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees ... ⁸ I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well—the delights of the heart of man. ⁹ I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. ¹⁰ I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. ¹¹ Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.

To Discuss in Groups:

1. Are there any words or ideas you do not understand?
2. Look at 1:12: How does the writer describe himself? What resources did he have?
3. Look at 1:13: What did Solomon, the Teacher-King, devote himself to do?
4. 1:16-18: He looks for meaning in wisdom and knowledge. What does he decide?
5. 2:1-3: Solomon next looks for satisfaction in pleasure. What does he decide?
6. 2:4-9: How else does the king try to find fulfillment in his life?
7. 2:10-11: Solomon gives a summary of all the ways he has tried to find happiness. How does he describe the result? What do you think "chasing after wind" means?

Summary:

People all over the world search for meaning, purpose, and satisfaction for their lives. Religious people may look for fulfillment from God. But even those who do not believe in God look to someone or something to give them their significance and satisfaction. You may hope that career success will convince you that "your life matters." You may look to a relationship - with a wife, husband, or lover to give you enjoyment. Solomon had almost unlimited resources of money and power. He looked for meaning in life apart from God. But great success, big projects, and pleasure did not satisfy him.

Notes:

The numbers in superscript (above the line) refer to Bible chapters and verses. For example, "¹1:12" means the book of Ecclesiastes - "Chapter 1 - verse 12."

These words are from the Bible book of Ecclesiastes. They were written by a teacher who had great wealth, royal power, and skillful intelligence. Tradition says the author is Solomon. He was one of the richest, most powerful, and wisest people who has ever lived. At first, Solomon limits his observations to what he can see ("life under the sun").

Based on what Solomon observes about life, he decides that there is no meaning or purpose in life - unless there is something "more" to life than you can see with your eyes "under the sun."

As in your graduate classes, we will use English in our discussion times each week.

For many of you, English is your second language. So, unlike your grad classes, please do not hesitate to ask questions about words that you do not understand!

Do not think that the Bible was written in English. We are ALL reading an English translation of the Bible - from the original Hebrew and Greek languages.

The spiritual faith that is taught in the Bible is not Western or English. These words all come from the ancient Middle East.

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2. What is a “False Hope”?

Here are some important questions to ask yourself. What do I live for? Whom do I live for?

- What **goal**, if I reach it, do I believe will give my life **significance**?
- To what **person** (or group of people) do I look to give me **satisfaction** in life?
- What is my great **treasure** (what do I value the most)? What gives me the most **pleasure** (what do I enjoy the most)?
- What or who is at the **center** of my life (where do I focus most of my time and effort)?
- What is my great **passion** in life (what motivates and gives me energy)?
- From what person or group do I need **approval**? (whose evaluation can delight me or depress me)?

What do these questions reveal?

These are **diagnostic** questions. They expose and uncover your greatest hopes and deepest fears. What is most important in your life? Do your studies or your career demand your 100% commitment? Will publishing a book give you meaning? What is your greatest ambition? Recognition? Wealth?

In ancient times, people built “high places” to their “gods.” Mayans built temples in central America. Mesopotamians built Ziggurats. The Egyptians built the Pyramids. There were various religious “shrines” or “temples” that represented what was most important in these ancient cultures.

In modern times, shrines seem primitive and superstitious. But we also have modern “high places.” Urban skyscrapers represent money, power, and prestige. Modern people can be “religious” about pursuing money or career success. What is the focus of your hope for a good life?

Why are these *false* hopes?

You can work hard, but not succeed. You can try to get rich or famous, but destroy your health or personal life. There is nothing wrong with money or success - unless they are your **ultimate hope**. They are all finite and can fail you. The Bible calls a “false hope” a “false god,” or an **idol**.

TO THINK ABOUT

Both “religious” people and “non-religious” people try to find favor or significance through personal performance. Some religions try to get favor with God by performing rituals. But non-religious people try to win favor with other people by personal or career achievements. All people – “religious” or not – try to get favor by doing something.

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Insights from the Bible:

Acts 17:16-32 ¹⁶ While Paul was waiting ... in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, "What is this babblers trying to say?" Others remarked, "He seems to be advocating foreign gods." They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. ¹⁹ Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?" ²⁰ You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean." ²¹ (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) ²² Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. ²³ For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. ²⁴ "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. ²⁵ And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. ²⁶ From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. ²⁷ God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸ 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' ²⁹ "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by man's design and skill. ³⁰ In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. ³¹ For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead." ³² When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject."

To Discuss in Groups:

1. Are there words or ideas that you do not understand? (See key words in Notes).
2. Verse 16: What made Paul feel "greatly distressed"?
3. Verse 22: The people of Athens constantly talked about ideas. Paul called them "very religious." Does this refer to their "objects of worship," their ideas, or both?
4. Verses 24 - 31: How is the God that Paul describes different than the "gods" (both religious objects and intellectual ideas) of the people of Athens?
5. Verse 25: How does Paul describe a "Global God"? How is this God different than the many ways that people worship today?
6. Verse 26: IF there is a God who sets the times and places where we live, what might be God's purpose for guiding you to this university for your studies?
7. Verse 27-30: According to Paul, what does this God want for all people to do?

Notes:

Some Key Words:

- verse 16: Paul of Tarsus: 1st century international ambassador of Christ.
- verse 17: synagogue: where the Jews met for worship and instruction.
- verse 18: Epicurean: one who believes pleasure is the main goal of life.
- verse 18: Stoic: one who believes that humans should not be affected by pleasure or pain. You calmly accept whatever happens to you.
- verse 19: Areopagus: the assembly of Athenians like a court. It had authority in all matters of religion and morality - especially over unknown religions and teachers.
- verse 23: inscription: writing "inscribed" on stone or metal.
- verse 30: repent: to turn away from wrong-thinking and wrong-doing - and then turn to God.

Background on Athens:

An ancient university city of famous thinkers: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Plato founded an Academy in 387 B.C. that became the first known university in the world. Even as late as the 1st century A.D., Athens was famous as a center of philosophical and scientific discussions.

Were they religious?

The people of Athens were intelligent and educated. They spent most of their time discussing new ideas. Like other ancient cultures, they had temples, filled with images that represented invisible god(s). But, like the scholars of Athens, we can make our human ideas into our "gods" or "idols" - things that we want to give our lives ultimate meaning.

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3. What makes a “false hope” dangerous?

Review: What is a “false hope”?

Any *thing* or *person* that you trust to give you significance or satisfaction can become a false hope. What is your treasure? What gives you pleasure? What, or who, gives you acceptance or approval?

All people, in all cultures, have religious impulses. We all look to *someone* or to *something* to provide us with meaning and purpose. You may not visit temples or shrines as your “high places.” But what is your top priority? If you are passionate about shopping, the markets may be your temple. You may think that wealth, doing good research, having career success, or family will give you meaning in life.

A “false hope” is anything *finite* that you hope will provide you with *ultimate* meaning and happiness. But anything finite can fail you, and can never guarantee you happiness. You can lose your health. You may only gain limited success. You may not become wealthy. Technology and military power do not solve all the world’s problems. “False hopes” are “false gods” - what the Bible defines as “idols.” *The things they treasure are worthless.* (from the Bible, Isaiah 44:9).

Good gifts can become “false gods”?

Finite things have *limited value*. They are not *infinite*. They cannot be God. Someone has observed: If you turn *good things* into *gods*, they can become *devils*. Some of God’s good gifts include: a loving family, a good education, a nice salary. But do not turn them into gods! If you substitute anything finite for God, it starts to control you. These things have real value as God’s “gifts.” But they are worthless as substitute “gods.”

Why are “false hopes” (idols) dangerous?

- False hopes do not fulfill your dreams. False hopes may promise long-lasting peace and joy. But they cannot keep this promise. Limited things have limited value. They are not ultimate.
- False hopes blind you to the true source of life. Idols are fake gods, imitations of what is real.
- If you only focus on *your* work, *your* success, or *your* family, you will become *self-centered*.

TO THINK ABOUT

“Everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving ...” From the Bible, 1 Timothy 4:4

“We forget that money is a human creation ... money begins to define us ... So, my worth as a human being is now assessed on the basis of how much I earn...” Vinoth Ramachandra

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Is there a “global God”?

Can people everywhere, from every nation, come together and find a trustworthy God? The Bible promises real, lasting hope from one true God. But we must give up all “God-substitutes,” “false hopes,” or worthless idols. There is a universal, world-wide, global problem. “*All the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.*” (from the Bible, Psalm 96:5). There is only one Maker of us all. You cannot manufacture your own meaning.

ALL of us - whether we are Atheist, Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Buddhist, Capitalist, Socialist, or Hedonist - fall into the trap of serving false hopes. We do not just break the rules. We try to set up rivals to the true God.

Insights from the Bible:

Romans 1:18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ 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 men are without excuse.

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen.

To Discuss in Groups:

1. Verse 18: What makes God angry when he looks at life on earth?
2. Verses 19-20: What has God made plain to all people everywhere? How might this explain why religion is universal - in all places, in many cultural forms?
3. Verse 21 says that all people respond to the knowledge of God in two wrong ways. What are they? What is wrong about being ungrateful?
4. Verse 21: When people reject the light of the knowledge of God, what is the result?
5. Verses 22-23: What else happens when people reject God’s light? How does idolatry dishonor the glory of God?
6. Verse 24: How does a distorted view of God distort human behavior?
7. Verse 25: If you *worship and serve created things* - why is that false, or living a lie?

TO THINK ABOUT

“For every civilization, for every period of history, it is true to say: ‘Show me what kind of gods you have, and I will tell you what kind of humanity you possess.’” Emil Brunner

Notes:

Background:

The section of the Bible is from Paul’s letter to Rome. Paul from Tarsus was a first century international ambassador of Jesus Christ.

Rome was capital of a great empire. Networks of highways connected distant parts of the world to the imperial city. Over those trade routes were exchanged products, cross-cultural information and religious ideas.

Jews in Rome knew the Old Testament part of the Bible. Rome was diverse. And Paul wanted to communicate two things to all people:

- Our universal problem.
- God’s universal offer of hope for the world.

So Paul does not begin by referring to the Bible (not all people know it.) Instead, he tells what all people can know from observing the world and human behavior.

Some Key Words:

- verse 18: wrath: God’s just and righteous anger about evil in the world he made.
- verse 18: godlessness: to live your life apart from God, in a God-less way.
- verse 18: wickedness: to live in an unjust way.
- verse 18: suppress: to keep the truth from being known. To withhold truth.
- verse 21: glorified: to give honor that is due to God.
- verse 21: futile: worthless, useless, nonsense.
- verse 24: sinful desires: a lust or strong desire for what is morally wrong.
- verse 24: degrading: to act in ways that are inhuman, disgraceful, insulting, or dishonorable.
- verse 25: Amen: to strongly affirm: “This is true!”

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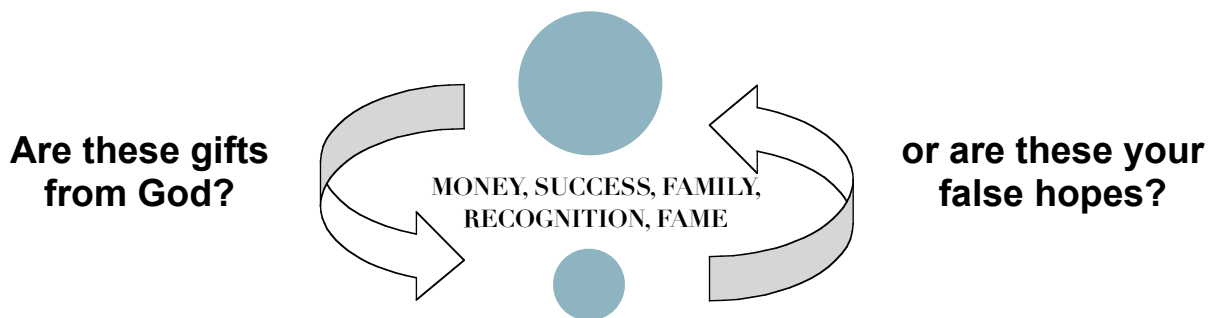


4. Identify Your “False Hopes”

Review from previous discussions

We have discussed a universal religious impulse. Whether you are from east or west, north or south, there is a search for significance and satisfaction in life. Even if you do not think you are religious - you may be an atheist - you look outside of yourself for hope and meaning. We have discussed:

- **The Definition of a False Hope.** A false hope, what the Bible calls an “idol,” is a thing or person that you hope will give your life meaning, purpose, acceptance, approval, or satisfaction. Your hope is the center of your life. A “god” is some thing or some one you live for. Is it a true or false hope?
- **The Danger of a False Hope.** False hopes are limited and finite. They cannot give you lasting happiness or ultimate meaning. Every false hope can fail you. To find a Global God you can trust, you must stop trusting or hoping in these false gods.
- **The Deception of a False Hope.** Bad things are obviously bad. But false hopes are deceptive. They can be good, finite things that you try to make ultimate. You can turn good things into “gods.” As we observed last week, when you turn good gifts into “gods,” they can become your “devils.”



- **Diagnose your False Hopes.** The first step is to identify your idols. Then you can find a global God you can trust. The real, infinite, true God will not fail you. The Bible says that good things (your work, family, and culture) are God’s gifts. It is not true that material things = bad things and spiritual things = good things. You can serve God with finite material things. But they must not become your false hopes or God-substitutes. God is the Giver of all life. And God wants to be honored as the Source of your meaning, purpose, and satisfaction in life. Only the true God is worthy of your ultimate love and life-long loyalty.

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Do you have any unhealthy patterns based on these false hopes?

- **Relationships.** "I will only have meaning or have worth in my life if _____ loves me."
- **Helping.** "My life only has meaning and will only have worth if _____ needs me."
- **Dependence.** "I must have someone to protect me and to keep me safe."
- **Political power.** "I only have value if I have the power to influence and control people."
- **Approval.** "I have worth and meaning because I am loved and respected by _____."
- **Self-image.** "I will only believe I have worth if I have this type of look or body image."
- **Control.** "I will only have meaning in life if I can master my life in the area of _____."
- **Work.** "My life will only be meaningful if I am successful and productive in _____."
- **Achievement.** "My life will have purpose if I am rewarded for my accomplishments."
- **Materialism.** "My life will only have meaning if I can have a certain standard of living."
- **Recognition.** "My goal in life is for this social or professional group to let me in."
- **Passion.** "What most controls me? What is the one thing I cannot live without?"
- **Fear.** "What am I the most afraid of? What am I constantly worrying about?"

Insights from the Bible:

Exodus 20:2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ³ "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴ You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a *jealous God*..."

Psalms 115:1 "Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness. ² Why do the nations say, "Where is their God?" ³ Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. ⁴ But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. ⁵ They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; ⁶ they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; ⁷ they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats. ⁸ Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them ... ¹⁵ May you be blessed by the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Habakkuk 2:18 "Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. ¹⁹ ... Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it. ²⁰ But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him."

To Discuss in Groups:

1. Exodus 20:2-3: What did God do for Israel? How did God want them to respond?
2. Exodus 20:4-5: What did God not want? What makes God *jealous*? (See note)
3. Psalm 115:1-3: What qualities did God reveal about himself to the people of Israel?
4. Psalm 115:4-8: How are idols different? Verse 15: What is the scope of this prayer?
5. Habakkuk 2:18-19: Why is it foolish to trust an idol?
6. Habakkuk 2:20: What should all people on earth do? Where is God's temple?

TO THINK ABOUT

Idols are what we make out of the evidence for God in ourselves and in the world ... Rather than look to the Creator and have to deal with [God as our Lord], we orient our lives toward the creation ... Since we were made to relate to God, but do not want to face Him and let Him control and shape us ... we inflate things in the world to religious proportions to fill the vacuum ... We do not just eliminate God ... we erect God-substitutes in His place." Tim Keller

Notes:

Background:

These Bible sections are from the Old Testament. God began a relationship with one people - Israel - to fulfill His purposes to bless ALL of the world.

God revealed His true character to that nation. They were commanded (Exodus 20) to worship the one true God and then to tell and show all nations what God is really like (as Psalm 115).

But Israel repeatedly turned away from God. They worshiped false gods like all the nations. As a result, they were invaded by those nations.

So, God warned Israel through messengers (prophets like Habakkuk). God also set in motion a better plan to reveal His love for the whole world.

Some Key Words:

- Exodus 20:5 *jealous God*. In our human experience, jealousy seems to be a bad thing, like envy. We can say, "I want what you have - and I resent that you have it."

But in perfect, infinite form, the LORD's jealousy is his **PASSION TO PROTECT A LOVE RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS PEOPLE**. A married man or woman is jealous if an adulterer intrudes into the relationship. Marriage must be protected! God has this pure, passionate love that God for people. God is rightly offended when any IDOL becomes the LORD'S RIVAL for the love of his people.

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5. Different Viewpoints

Review

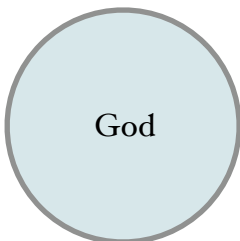
All people look to **someone** or **something** to find their meaning, significance, and satisfaction in life. But we may trust in **false hopes**. The Bible calls these “**idols**.” Even good things - like a career, money, or family - can become a substitute for God. Nations and cultures are divided by religions. To find a global God that we can trust, each of us must identify our false hopes and false gods.

Here is a general summary of very different **Viewpoints on Life**.



- **Materialist or Atheist** - This viewpoint is represented by a single circle. There is no God. The circle represents all reality. And everything is material, and not spiritual. Everything comes from non-living things or physical processes. The universe is not a “creation,” since there is no Creator. You must make, buy, or achieve your own meaning in life. Hope comes from **what you make or do**. **The challenge for a materialist:** How do you fill the spiritual emptiness in your life? Is there any ultimate meaning - after you die - beyond your life time?

- **Pantheist - God in all things.** This is also represented by one circle. But reality is not only material. All things are filled with spiritual energy. There may be many unseen “gods.” All living things are considered sacred, because all things are part of the divine. **The challenge for a pantheist:** Is evil real, or only apparent? Everyone wants justice - for things to be made right. Does karma or reincarnation give final justice? Is there never ending conflict between gods in the circle of life?



- **Theist - Belief in God.** The Creator (God) and creatures (other living things) are distinct. God made and sustains all reality. Physical and natural laws were designed by God. God rules over all things - to fulfill God’s ultimate goals and purposes. God can choose to overrule the natural order. So, miracles are possible. All living things have value. Not because they are gods. but because created by God. God made all things - all depend on God. **The challenges:** For **Islam:** What is God like? Is Allah personal and loving, not only supreme? For **Christianity:** Do Christians worship a mortal man or prophet as “God”? Or, did God come to earth to reveal himself in a perfect human man - Jesus?

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YOU can help begin our discussion!

There are as many **points of view** as there are people in the world! No one “fits” exactly into the categories of “Materialist,” “Pantheist,” or “Theist.”

- Which of these is most similar to your current point of view?
- How do you describe **your current viewpoint about life and reality**?

As an international scholar, you have found that many Americans believe in God. You may think few of them share or understand your cultural and spiritual opinions. That is uncomfortable! **Christians** were once a small, misunderstood, and persecuted group. They believed that one true God had planned a hope and future for all nations. But the world was filled with many religions. The 1st century Christians were a small minority. So, how did the first Christians: 1) Stay true to their own beliefs? 2) Encourage their friends to trust in God? and 3) Live with sincere love and respect for friends and fellow-workers who believed in other gods and sacrificed to idols?

Insights from the Bible:

¹ Corinthians 8:1 Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. ² The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. ³ But the man who loves God is known by God.

⁴ So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. ⁵ For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), ⁶ yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live. And there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.

⁷ But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol ... ⁸ But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do.

To Discuss in Groups:

1. Are there words or ideas that you do not understand? (See key words in Notes).
2. Verse 1: What is the practical question discussed in this part of the Bible?
3. Verses 1-2: What is the difference between love and knowledge?
4. Verses 4-5: This is a short summary of what Christians believe about God and idols. What question would you ask a Christian friend who believes this way?
5. Verses 7-8: This tells Christians how they should relate to people who believe in other gods. How would you challenge a Christian friend to apply these words?

TO THINK ABOUT

“At the heart of idolatry is the attempt to manipulate ‘God’ or the unseen ‘spiritual world’ in order to obtain security and well-being for oneself and one’s ‘group’ (whether family, business ... nation-state).”

Vinoth Ramachandra

Notes:

Background:

The 1st century world was filled with religions. Some believed in one God, like the Jews. Others believed in many gods - Zeus, etc. Some called Caesar “Lord,” and “Savior of the world.” But Christians could not.

Some people worshiped the Roman emperor as a god. Workers in some trades had to worship a “god” who blessed their jobs. Food sold in the markets was sacrificed to idols.

This Bible portion may not be your viewpoint. But it describes a time when Christians were a minority. These words were written to Christians in Corinth (in modern Greece). It was a multi-cultural city like Atlanta and proud of knowledge (like Georgia Tech).

Some Key Words:

- Verse 1: puffs up: inflates your ego, so that you act proud and look down on other people as ignorant.
- Verse 1: builds up: help your friend to grow and mature.
- Verse 4: sacrificed: food was taken to a temple where it was dedicated to a “god” (physically represented by a statue or carved idol).
- Verse 5: so-called gods, gods, and lords. Christians do not deny that their friends believe in gods, demi-gods, or unseen lords that rule over part of heaven or earth. But Christians do not believe these are real gods.
- Verse 6: Lord: this word is sometimes a personal name for God. But here, Lord is similar to “landlord,” and refers to how God has given ownership and management of all things in “heaven and earth” to his eternal Son, sent into the world as Savior and Lord for all nations.
- Verse 7: accustomed: The customs or habits that people practice regularly.

Is There a Global God You Can Trust?



6. We All Have Problems with “False Hopes”

Review:

- **The Definition.** A “false hope” - what the Bible calls an “idol” - is any person or thing that you hope will provide you with meaning, purpose, approval, or satisfaction in life.
- **The Danger.** No limited, finite hope can give you lasting happiness or ultimate meaning in life. Every false hope will finally fail you.
- **The Deception.** False hopes deceive you. Good things (like intelligence, culture, family, friends) can be made into “gods.” Things that are valuable gifts from God are worthless as false gods.

There is no God
... only nature

For the person who does not believe in God. You may look to **replace God**. If there is no “god,” you may look for a substitute. You hope that something else will provide you meaning, purpose, and fulfillment. You may not believe in God, but you may become “religious” about your work. You may be “totally committed” to make money. You may “devote yourself” to serve others. These are your God-substitutes. They are your religion and passion.

“He who does not believe in God will believe in anything.” G. K. Chesterton

God



For a person who does believe in God. You may embrace a **rival** to God. You have faith in God, but there is something more that you also must have! Even people who believe in God often hold to false gods. For example, Christians can be addicted to shopping, eating, drinking, or physical beauty. You believe in God - but also in your own security, popularity, or comfort.

In relationships, a Rival is someone who competes for the love or the affection of another person.

What is the difference between these false hopes? A person who does not believe in God makes a **replacement** for God. But the person who does believe in God can fall in love with a **rival** for God. Someone without faith breaks God’s **Law**. “*You shall not make for yourself an idol...*” (Exodus 20:4) But the Christian turns away from God’s **Love**. *You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.*” (Exodus 20:5) **We all fall short** of God’s purposes for us. When a Christian turns to a false hope, that is unfaithfulness to God’s love - a spiritual love affair!

Is There a Global God You Can Trust?

When you study ancient history and world cultures, you see examples of idolatry. But what about idolatry today? We can look with critical judgment at temples that are filled with the statues of gods or hand carved idols. But what about idolatry in the developed West? What are our false hopes? What captures the hearts of people today? "Idols are not just on pagan altars, but in well-educated human hearts and minds ..." (Richard Keyes)

Insights from the Bible:

Matthew 6:19 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²⁴ No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

²⁵ Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

²⁸ "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

³¹ So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

To Discuss in Groups:

1. Where do you store your valuables? If your house was on fire, but your family members were in a safe place, what would you rescue from your burning home?
2. Verses 19-21: Where are two places to store your valuables? What do you risk if you only save for here and now? How is your *treasure* connected to your *heart*?
3. Verse 24: Why is it impossible for anyone to serve two Masters at the same time?
4. Verses 25-27: What should believers in Christ not do? What do we learn from birds?
5. Verses 28-30: What can we learn from flowers in the field?
6. Verse 33: What do pagans worry about? What should be the top priority for a believer in God? What promise is made to them?

TO THINK ABOUT

You may think sin is only to "break the rules" or "disobey God's laws." But human sin is much more serious! We disrespect God's honor and turn away from God's love. Sin is like rejecting a husband or wife to have an affair. Sin is like dishonoring your father who loves you, or your mother who has made many sacrifices for you. When you replace your Creator with created things, you do not just sin against God's Law, but also against God's Love. You go after things that are rivals to God's honor and love.

Notes:

Background:

This Bible portion is from one of the most famous of all Jesus' teachings, the "Sermon on the Mount."

Here, Jesus teaches about God's Kingdom. He teaches his followers to live in a way that is different from the way most people live in the world.

Do you think that Christians in the West live like this?

Some Key Words:

- Verse 24: devoted: to be totally committed, with an almost religious attachment.
- Verse 24: despise: look down on something.
- Verse 24: Money: this word is capitalized, because it means turning money into a false god, Mammon.
- Verse 28: lilies of the field: a kind of flower.
- Verse 29: Solomon: the most wealthy and wise king of ancient Israel.
- Verse 29: splendor: to show your prestige and honor - to be called "your majesty."
- Verse 32: pagans: people who do not believe in God.
- Verse 33: righteousness: ways that are just, right, and true - and that honor God.

If good gifts ...

- Intelligence
- Family
- Talent
- Career
- Money
- Technology
- Success

**“Everything God created
is good and to be received
with thanks.”**

From the Bible: 1 Timothy 4:4,
The Message

become your “gods” ...

- What do you constantly think about?
- Who is always on your mind?
- If you do not accomplish your life goals, will you feel hopeless or worthless?
- What makes you feel important?
- Who makes you feel important?

**You shall have “no other
gods, only me.”**

From the Bible: Exodus 20:3
The Message

they can become your “devils.”

- What, or who, controls your time?
- What, or who, controls your thoughts?
- Whose demands can you not refuse?

**“Everything is permissible for
me — but I will not be mastered
by anything.”**

From the Bible: 1 Corinthians 6:12

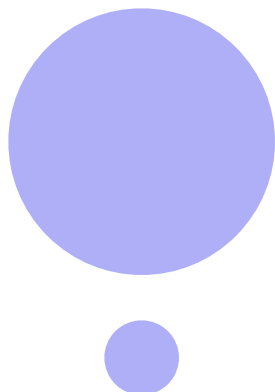
**“A man is a slave to whatever
has mastered him.”**

From the Bible, 2 Peter 2:19

TO THINK ABOUT

In *Gods That Fail*, Vinoth Ramachandra writes that those who worship technology can develop machine-like personalities, are emotionally under-developed, shallow in their relationships, and are driven by a desire to control. Those who worship sex become incapable of trust and commitment in human relationships and may devalue women, abuse children, and may be drawn to pornography. People who worship power live in constant suspicion, insecurity and fear that others will become rivals. Do you agree with Ramachandra's analysis?

Is There a Global God You Can Trust?



7. The Reflection of God

Review:

- **The Definition.** A “false hope” is any person or any thing that you hope will provide you with meaning, purpose, approval, and satisfaction in life. According to the Bible, a false hope is a “false god,” or an “idol.”
- **The Danger.** No limited, finite hope can provide you with lasting happiness or ultimate meaning in life. Every false hope will finally fail you.
- **The Deception.** False hopes deceive you. Good things (like intelligence, culture, family, friends) can be made into “gods.” Things that are valuable gifts from God are worthless as false gods.
- **A Universal Problem.** Both religious and non-religious people may have false hopes. A person who does not believe in God can try to **replace God** with something else. But the person who does believe in God can have a **rival to God**. There is something or someone that competes for your trust, loyalty, and commitment.
- **A personal example: “technology.”** God gives us many good gifts to enjoy and use. But if they become your false “gods,” that you must have to live your life, they become your “devils.” These are just tools - and they can become unreliable and fail you.

The Image of God

The Bible teaches that humans were made in *the image of God*. This means that we were made to reflect God’s honor, beauty, goodness, and glory. The **moon** reflects the light and brilliance of the **sun**. You can look at the moon. But, if you look directly into the sun, you will be blinded by the sun’s brightness. Humans should reflect God’s beauty and glory. We are not the source of light. But we can reflect God. Like the moon, we can reflect God’s light and brilliance. To reflect God’s glory in your life and work is what gives you **dignity** (you were made in God’s image). But this is also your **humility** (you are only an image). **Question:** Do you make photocopies from a copy, or from an original? When we make a “god” in our own “image,” we make “copies from a copy.”

Is There a Global God You Can Trust?

Insights from the Bible:

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Psalms 8:3 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, ⁴ what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? ⁵ You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. ⁶ You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: ⁷ all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, ⁸ the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. ⁹ O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Psalms 115:1,3-4,16: ¹ Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your Name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness ... ³ Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. ⁴ But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men ... ¹⁶ The highest heavens belong to the LORD, but the earth he has given to man.”

To Discuss in Groups:

1. Genesis 1:26: What two words describe the nature of humans?
2. Genesis 1:26: What describes the work of humans?
3. Genesis 1:27: Describe the relationship God gives between men and women. Are males and females equal? Or are they not equal in human dignity?
4. Psalms 8:3-4: What gives wonder to the writer of this Psalm? What amazes the Psalm writer the most?
5. Psalms 8:5-9: What is the dignity (important place) of humans in this world? According to verse 9, who should get the highest honors?
6. Psalms 115:1: Why should the Lord (his fame and name) get highest honors?
7. Psalms 115:3-4: How is God different than man-made idols or “gods”?
8. Psalms 115:16: How do we see both our dignity and our humility in this verse?

Notes:

Background:

Genesis is the first Bible book. The word “Genesis” means “beginnings.” Genesis 1:26-27 tells us about God’s original design for humans - the place for men and women in the world God made.

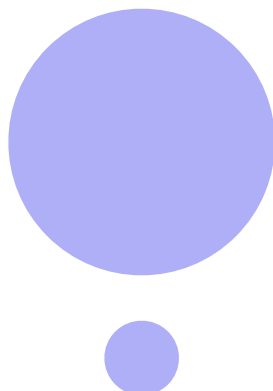
The **Psalms** are in the middle of the Bible. They are a library of poems. **Psalm 8** celebrates how God created and cares for us in the world.

Psalm 115 also praises God’s qualities. God’s character is contrasted with the nature of man-made images of God.

Some Key Words:

- Genesis 1:26: Let us: Christians believe this is a hint that the one true God exists in 3 persons - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To whom does God speak? Angels are creatures, not creators.
- Genesis 1:26 and Psalms 8:6: rule, ruler. The idea is delegated authority - rule for God.
- Genesis 1:26: livestock: animals like cattle, horses, sheep, pigs.
- Verses 26-27: created creatures: living things that are made by God.
- Psalms 8:3: consider: think carefully about.
- Psalms 8:4: mindful: think of, keep in mind.
- Psalms 8:5: heavenly beings. Spiritual and invisible creatures, like angels.
- Psalms 8:9: majestic: impressive, full of splendor and honor, the king’s greatness.

Is There a Global God You Can Trust?



8. Distorting Human Dignity

Review:

- **The Definition.** A “false hope” or “idol” is a person or thing that you hope will give you meaning, purpose, approval, or satisfaction in life.
- **The Danger.** No limited, finite hope can give you lasting happiness or meaning in life.
- **The Deception.** False hopes deceive you and promise more than they can give you. Good things (like intelligence, culture, family, friends) can be made into false “gods.”
- **The Universal Problem.** Both religious and non-religious people have false hopes. People who do not believe in God search for a God-**replacement** in their lives. People who do believe in God can serve **rivals** to God. Their loyalties are divided.
- **The image of God.** The Bible teaches that all humans were made in God’s image. You can reflect God’s glory and character. This produces human dignity and humility. You are God’s **image** - you can reflect God (your dignity). But you are only an image - you are not God (your humility).

Do You Affirm or Distort God’s Image?

Are you “lower than the angels (but) **crowned** with glory and honor?” (Psalm 8:5). Then, you should treat other people, and yourself, with honor and respect. But what happens if you do not see yourself or other people in God’s image? What if you begin to act like a “god”? Before we look at some Bible portions, look at these alternatives.

Bible Viewpoint: Humans are made in God’s image	Humans are <u>not</u> God’s image
Your identity : God’s image is who you are - you are a human being .	Your identity: you are what you do (a worker) or you are what you have (a consumer).
Humans have delegated, limited authority . All are God’s servants who rule for God.	Humans can be absolute rulers over others. Those in power can rule for their own interests.
Men and women are both God’s image, maybe with different roles, but equal worth.	Men are better than women. Society does not need to treat women with the same respect.

Is There a Global God You Can Trust?

How is God's image related to our dignity? What happens - to you and to others - if you reflect God? What happens if we act like gods? How does denying God's image devalue other humans?

Insights from the Bible:

Genesis 9:6 "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man."

Proverbs 14:31 You insult your Maker when you exploit the powerless; when you're kind to the poor, you honor God.

Psalms 34:3 Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together. ⁴ I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears. ⁵ Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.

James 3:9 With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing ... this should not be.

To Discuss in Groups:

1. Genesis 9:6: Why is killing a human different than killing an animal for food?
2. How is the value of a human life different than animal life?
3. Proverbs 14:31: Why is it easy to take advantage of poor people?
4. What are some examples of social injustice that you have observed?
5. When you abuse or "mis-use" someone, how do you treat them as less than human? What human behavior honors God?
6. Psalm 34:3: What does it mean for people to "glorify" and "exalt" God?
7. Psalm 34:4: What happens to those who seek God?
8. Psalm 34:5: What are two positive results for those who look to God?
9. James 3:9: How should those who worship God treat other people?

TO THINK ABOUT

"Our humanity is found in worship of the One who gives us life ... and who calls us to share His glory as His image-bearers. Such worship enhances our humanness, but the worship of that which is inferior to us can only diminish our humanness by turning us into objects rather than persons." Vinoth Ramachandra

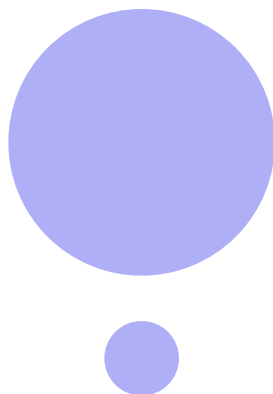
Notes:

Background: God's Old Testament people (the nation of Israel) were not permitted to make images of God - humans are reflections of God. This belief about human nature was the basis for laws for society and human relationships.

Some Key Words:

- Genesis 9:6. Sheds the blood. The crime of murder or bloodshed.
- Proverbs 14:31. insult. To scorn, dishonor, or speak against.
- Proverbs 14:31. Exploit. To mistreat or take advantage of someone.
- Psalm 34:3. Glorify. The idea is to "magnify." Think of a telescope: it does not "make large" a distant planet, but allows you to see how large it really is. If you "glorify" the LORD, you do not make God great - but you recognize God's greatness.
- Psalm 34:3. exalt. To declare that the LORD is higher than all things.
- Psalm 34:5. Radiant, shame. There are two possibilities here. If you seek God's face, you will reflect His glory. But if you only seek approval from people, you can "lose face" - be ashamed in front of other people.

Is There a Global God You Can Trust?



9. What is God Really Like?

Review: The Bible warns about “false hopes.” We must not make images of God - idols.

- **False hopes** are the people or things that you hope will give you meaning, purpose, approval, or satisfaction in life.
- **False hopes are finite.** A limited hope cannot give you lasting happiness or meaning.
- **You can turn good things** (your intelligence, culture, family, friends) into false “gods.”
- **Both religious and non-religious** have false hopes. If you **do not** believe in God, you can try to **replace God** with something else. A **believer** may serve a **rival** to God.
- The Bible teaches that we are made in **God’s image**. So, we must not make images of God. Our dignity is to **reflect God’s honor**, like the moon reflects the sun’s light.

All Images of God Distort Reality

Famous non-religious thinkers have used the concept of idol-making (our “false hopes”) to claim that religion is what is wrong with the world.

- German philosopher *Feuerbach* said that “God” is an image of our consciousness. God is a “projected image” (like a slide presentation) from our human experience.
- Austrian psychologist *Freud*, claimed that the idea of “God” is a projection of our human desires, fears, and longings.
- German philosopher *Marx* claimed that religion holds back or suppresses the longings and the hopes of oppressed people.

Is There a Perfect Image of God?

- **Hinduism** often represents God(s) with images.
- **Islam** forbids all images of God. Allah is revealed in word (the Qu’ran), but is above human comprehension. People submit to God’s will, but do not know God personally.
- **The Bible** says that making images of God distorts the truth and reality about God. Each of us is made in God’s image. But we all misrepresent God. Our ideas about God are never right. So how can we know what God is like? Only God can perfectly reveal God. But can we know God personally, Person-to-person?

Is There a Global God You Can Trust?

The Bible says that God not only revealed himself verbally. He also revealed himself personally. You cannot look directly on God's divine majesty and glory, just as you cannot look into the sun's brightness. God came in a perfect human person so we can know him personally.

Insights from the Bible:

John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

⁶ There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

⁹ The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He (the Word) was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth ... ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

To Discuss in Groups:

1. Verses 1-2: Does God have a beginning? Does the Word have a beginning?
2. Who is the Word? The verses say the Word "was with God" and "was God." Can both of these statements be true?
3. Verse 3: What has the Word done?
4. Verses 4-8: What did the Light do? Who was a witness to the Light? Who is the Light? Verse 7: Why did John point people to the Light?
5. Verses 9-10: What are the relationships between the Word and the world? Verse 11: How was the true Light received? Verse 12: What is given to you if receive and believe the Word? Verse 13: How do you become God's child?
6. Verses 14: How did God reveal Himself in more than words?
7. Verse 18: If we cannot see God directly, how is God made known to us?

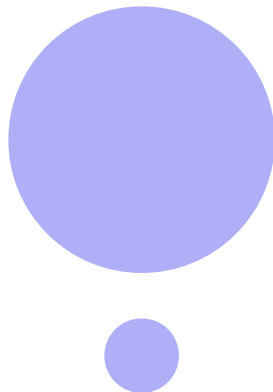
Notes:

Background: this book is the fourth Gospel ("good news") about the life and work of Christ. This book was written to explain Christian faith to those with no Bible background.

Some Key Words:

- **LANGUAGE GUIDE:** except for verses 7-8, all of the personal pronouns "He" refer to Christ as the Word of God.
- **Verse 1: In the beginning was the Word:** This refers back to the first verses in the Bible: Genesis 1:1, 3: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth ... and God said, 'Let there be light.'" So God "spoke" all things into existence. The New Testament shows that this Word was a Person.
- **Verse 6: John:** John was like Old Testament prophets - he promised God's coming to rescue the world from sin, sickness, and death. He introduced Jesus Christ to his own people Israel.
- **Verse 7: Witness, testify:** Just as in a court of law, a witness is someone who is asked to speak (testify) to what he has seen and heard.
- **Verse 13: born of God:** This is a contrast with natural human birth. You are naturally born into a human family. But you must be spiritually born into God's family.
- **Verse 18: One and Only - made him known:** These words mean that Christ is uniquely the eternal Son of God. No one can better "explain" God to us, both verbally and visibly.

Is There a Global God You Can Trust?



10. The Perfect Image of God

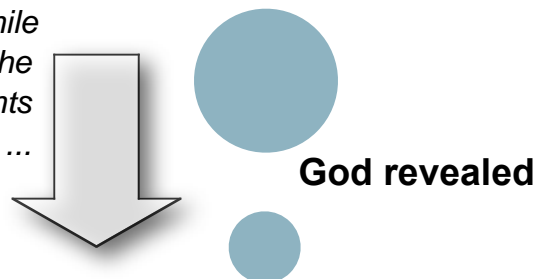
Review: All of us sometimes put our trust in “false hopes.” The Bible calls these “idols.”

- **False hopes** are people or things that you hope will give your life meaning and purpose.
- False hopes are **finite**. Limited hopes cannot give you lasting happiness or meaning.
- Even **good things** (intelligence, culture, family, friends) can become your false “gods.”
- **Religious** and **non-religious** people have false hopes. People who **do not believe** in God can **replace God** with other things. **Believers** in God may serve **rivals** to God.
- The Bible says that humans are in **God’s image**. We must not make images of God. Our dignity is to **reflect God’s honor**, like the moon reflects the light of the sun.
- All our images **distort God’s real nature**. Our ideas about God cannot represent God. How can we know what God is really like? The Bible claims to reveal God in **words**. But God was also revealed **personally**, in history, in a perfect human person. So, we can relate to God **person-to-Person**, and not just person-to-ideas about God.

Is There a Perfect Image of God?

We cannot come to God with our images or thoughts. None of us has a perfect idea about God. Only God can “come down” to perfectly reveal himself in spirit and truth.

“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts ... (God says) my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways ... For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (From the Bible, Isaiah 55)



You may be a Christian, a Hindu, a Buddhist, a capitalist, a Muslim, or an atheist. But **we all** distort God’s image. The Bible says that only Jesus Christ is the perfect and undistorted revealing of God in human form.

Is There a Global God You Can Trust?

Insights from the Bible:

Hebrews 1:1 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. ³ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

To Discuss in Groups:

1. Describe ways that YOU reveal your personality to other people? When do you choose to let other people know the "real you"?
2. IF there is a God, do you think God wants to reveal himself to us? Why?
3. Verse 1: How did God speak to the ancestors of the Jews?
4. If you want someone to clearly understand who you are, which is better: To send a messenger to tell them about you? Or, to talk with them personally?
5. Verse 2: In the first century A.D., just before this letter was written, how did God speak to the Jewish people?
6. Verses 2-3 describe both the Person and the Work of God's Son, Jesus Christ.
7. In your group, discuss each of these descriptions of God's Son, Jesus Christ:

The Person of Christ	The Work of Christ
He is the Son of God	He speaks for God
He is the Heir of all things	He made all things
He is the radiance of God's glory	He sustains all things by His powerful Word
He exactly represents God's being	He provides purification for sins

8. Verse 3: What did Christ come to earth to do for us?
9. Verse 3: What words indicate that Christ has finished his work for us?
10. Verse 3: Where is Christ now?

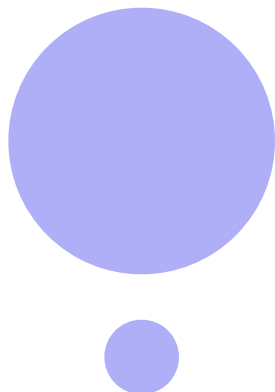
Notes:

Background: These words begin a letter written to "Hebrew" Christians. They were born Jews. But they had decided to become Christians. Because they had a Jewish background, these people knew that God had revealed himself to their ancestors - in both spiritual words and powerful deeds.

Some Key Words:

- Verse 1: our forefathers: their ancestors.
- Verse 1: prophets: God's representatives who spoke God's words. Like an ambassador speaks for a king. For centuries, Old Testament Hebrew prophets spoke to people about their Lord and King.
- Verse 1: various ways: different kinds of ways.
- Verse 2: appointed means to be chosen or designated. An heir is one chosen to inherit the Father's possessions.
- Verse 3: radiance: brightness. God's glory shines in the Son of God.
- Verse 3: exact representation: the word is "character," the exact reproduction or "imprint" of God's nature. The Son is "stamped" or "engraved" with God's own personal character.
- Verse 3: sustaining: holding things together. The Son maintains all things by what he says - so things don't fall apart.
- Verse 3: purification: to make clean, purify by sacrificing for our sins.
- Verse 3: right hand: the highest place of honor.

Is There a Global God You Can Trust?



11. How Can I Know and Trust God?

Review: All people everywhere may trust in “false hopes.” The Bible calls these “idols.”

- **False hopes** are people or things that you hope will provide you meaning and purpose.
- False hopes are **finite**. Limited hopes cannot give lasting happiness or meaning.
- You can make **God’s good gifts** (intelligence, culture, family, friends) into **false gods**.
- Both **religious** and **non-religious** people fall into the trap of trusting in false hopes. **Idols** can be either **replacements** for God or **rivals** to God.
- We are in **God’s image**. We can **reflect God’s honor**, like the moon reflects the sun.
- All of our ideas about God **distort God**. Our images do not accurately represent God.
- What is God really like? The Bible reveals God in **words**. Jesus Christ revealed God in **person**, in history. We can know God **person-to-Person**, not just person-to-ideas.



Try this Experiment:

You sit in a quiet room with a person you have just met. Neither of you is allowed to talk. You must sit in silence. You can look at each other, but you may not converse. How can you know the person who sits in front of you? You can observe each other, but you cannot speak.

Now try the same experiment with an invisible, spiritual, infinite, and personal Being - God. You can physically observe a human being across a table. But you cannot see God. Only when a person speaks do you learn about their character, goals, and true nature.

Persons reveal themselves, or make themselves known, through personal revelation. Only if another person reveals himself or herself to you can you know them personally. How do you decide to respect, or trust, or to love someone? Only when that person reveals their true character to you, in both words and deeds.

The Bible teaches that God has revealed his true character to us - in words and deeds - in the person of Jesus Christ.

Is There a Global God You Can Trust?

Insights from the Bible:

John 14:1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going."

⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

⁸ Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." ⁹ Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves."

To Discuss in Groups:

1. Verse 1: Your group leader will read the Note on the Background. Based on this, what are some reasons that Jesus' followers might be worried and upset?
2. Verse 1: What does Jesus command his disciples to do - instead of worrying? They cannot trust the authorities or even each other (Judas turns Jesus over to the authorities). Who should disciples trust? What is significant about this?
3. Verse 2: How does Jesus describe heaven? (See note on key words, verse 2).
4. Verses 2-3: For what purpose did Jesus leave and go back to heaven? Look for two things that Jesus will do for his friends after he leaves them on earth.
5. Verse 5: How did Thomas react when Jesus says that his disciples know the place where he is going?
6. Verse 6: Where is Jesus going? What four claims does Jesus make in verse 6? See if you can put each of these claims in your own words.
7. Verse 7: Jesus makes another claim here. Some people say, "Jesus was a great man, a great prophet and teacher. But he never claimed to be God." What do you think?
8. Verses 8-11: What did Philip ask? What do Jesus' words and works reveal?

Notes:

Background: Only the Gospel of John (the 4th New Testament book) records this event.

Jesus' betrayer (Judas) has just left the room. Jesus knows he will be handed over to the Jewish and Roman authorities. He will be put on trial and then executed on a cross.

Now, as Jesus meets privately with his closest friends, he comforts them and prepares them for what will happen.

Jesus will: 1) die, 2) be raised from the dead, and 3) leave his disciples on earth when he returns to God the Father in heaven.

Some Key Words:

- Verse 2: Father's house: This is how Jesus describes heaven. He is God's Son who came from heaven. So, Jesus speaks of going home - to return to his Father's house.
- Verse 3: I will come back: The Bible teaches that God the Father first sent his Son from heaven to accomplish our salvation. Jesus lived a perfect life that we cannot live. And he died for us a death that our sins deserve. But the Bible also says that Christ will return to earth a second time. On that unknown day, Jesus will lead all who have trusted in him home with him to his Father's house.
- Verse 11: miracles: these are the works of God that Jesus did to reveal the reality of God and God's kingdom.

Knowing Things and Knowing Persons

Knowing Things - through Science

Physical things are known through science, by observing things. A scientist is a subject who observes an object. For example, a physician measures your blood pressure and temperature. The scientific method says that theories must be based on empirical data. Scientific theories all claim to be research based. Scientists seek to collect, interpret, and “master” the data that they observe. The God of the Bible encourages this way and process of knowing.



Knowing Persons - through Revelation

Personal knowledge comes through revelation. When you “know” a friend, a parent, husband or wife - that is a different way of knowing. You do not measure them. You know persons in a personal way.

When you meet someone, your first impressions may not be accurate. But you talk, listen, and share your stories. You come to know them subject-to-subject, person to person. You do not treat them like an object. Over time, you begin to trust this new person, and you discover more about them. If someone refuses to reveal himself or herself to you, you can never have a personal relationship.

Knowing God Personally - through God’s personal Revelation

The Bible teaches that we only know God through revelation. God is not an object for investigation. You can never know everything about God. If God has not spoken, you cannot know him at all. Christians believe that God loves people enough to reveal himself.

Christians believe that: 1. God has spoken in the Bible so that we can know, trust, and love him in a personal way. And, 2. God was perfectly revealed in Jesus Christ, so we can know and trust in God’s love, promises, and reliability.

Knowing a person is different than understanding data. You can never “master” or “explain” a relationship completely. Knowing God is not theoretical, but personal. “This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:3)

Can you personally know the infinite, spiritual, invisible God you cannot observe? Yes - if God has made himself known to you. God is revealed in three ways. Christians believe that God has been revealed in human history, in human words - the Bible, and in a human person - God’s Son from heaven, Jesus Christ.