

DISCOVERING GOD

INTRODUCTION

Does God really exist? If He does, what is He like?

Virtually every person asks—and answers these two questions in one way or another. They are as ancient as our earliest human history and as contemporary as our latest scientific exploration.

Astronomer George Greenstein in his book, *The Symbiotic Universe*, asked:

As we survey all the evidence, the thought insistently arises that some supernatural agency—or rather, Agency—must be involved. Is it possible that suddenly, without intending to, we have stumbled upon scientific proof of a Supreme Being? Was it God who stepped in and so providentially crafted the cosmos for our benefit?

For a while we really believed that modern science would provide answers to these two questions—and these answers would force us to outgrow our dependence upon supernatural explanations. The reverse is happening. The more we learn about our world and the universe, the more compelling these questions become. They are not going to go away anytime soon.

Answers vary wildly. The Hindu may believe in 60 million gods, and the Marxist will maintain that there is no God at all. In either case, the meaning of life rides on the answer the person chooses. Our understanding of God, whatever it might be, defines our worldview, our values and the way we live our everyday lives. Thus, we are subjectively involved in the things we believe. We are compelled to justify, or explain, our way of life, if only to ourselves.

Another thing we can be sure of—whatever our beliefs might be and whether these beliefs are the result of careful study or were casually collected from random sources—they are flawed! This also holds true for those of us who know God through Jesus Christ. We know God—in part. Paul wrote:

We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright. We'll see it all then, see it as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us!

—1 Corinthians 13:12 (*The Message*)

We peer through a fog because our finite minds cannot comprehend an infinite God. Since our understanding is so fragmentary, there is nothing more important in life than to pursue a better knowledge of God. This determines everything else in our lives. If we are wrong here, nothing else will be right. Life won't make sense.

The purpose of this study is to help us revisit our concept of God, to hold our notions of Him up against the biblical record of His revelation of Himself. This study is critical, because our answers determine not only how we live but also our character and ultimately our eternal destinies.

So what does this have to do with business and commerce? Often, we tend to arrange our lives into two compartments: the physical and the spiritual. We segregate our religious and commercial activities. Because it has to do with the “real world,” we often apply a different set of rules to business. It's best, we reason, not to mix it with religion.

It's probably true, religion and business don't mix. But what about God Himself and commerce? His place in our business is inescapable! How we manage our business affairs is of major importance to Him. We will progressively see this as we move through this module. Modules 4–6 probe more deeply into the importance of work and commerce to God. First, however, we need to lay a solid foundation.

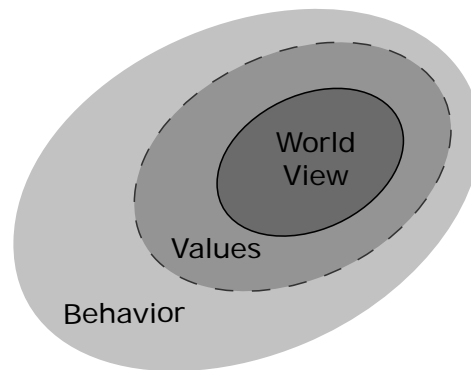
Because God created this “real world,” He has a vested interest in how we manage it.

This is good news! Perhaps there is more to business than we imagined! Could God be committed to my daily schedule, my ongoing frustrations and successes? Yes, He is invested in us. He is indeed the God of Commerce.

Question for thought: What sources have influenced you most in forming your understanding of God? How reliable do you think these sources are?

WORLDVIEW, VALUES AND BEHAVIOR

We will be using these three terms as we work through this series. They serve two purposes: they will help us summarize the things we learn and help us apply what we've learned to our lives. The three terms can be diagrammed as follows:



SOME DEFINITIONS

Worldview: Every person has a worldview. It is the way we see and interpret reality. It determines how a person answers the big questions of existence: How do I understand the natural world and its origins? How did it come about? What about me? What am I? Why do I exist? What is my notion of God or gods?

A worldview is a composite of beliefs, usually collected from one's culture, traditions, family, education and religion.

My worldview tells me who I am.

Values: Worldview determines one's values. A value is something so important to a person that it motivates his or her behavior. If, for example, I believe I am nothing more than a biological accident—that I, together with the natural world, just happened—this belief will be reflected in the things I attach importance to. Self-fulfillment, for example, would certainly be close to the top of my list of values.

Behavior: Our behavior reflects our worldview plus our values. It is the physical expression of our self-perceptions and what we consider important. So if self-fulfillment is a driving value for me, my behavior will follow. I will spend a lot of my time and energy pursuing the things that make me feel good.

Thus, **worldview, values** and **behavior** serve as a basic framework for understanding our society and ourselves. They also instruct us on how to change. When we try to change our behavior, we fail because nothing is different on the *inside!* The Bible says:

“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life”—Proverbs 4:23.

True change comes from within. That’s our goal in these studies; true, inner change that is rooted in a transformation of the inner person. We begin by expanding and correcting our understanding of God in order to align our lives accordingly. As we do this, every area of our lives will be enriched, from what takes place in our families to what happens in the course of our business.