

Are There Many Ways to God?

Religious Pluralism



Outline

1. What is Religious Pluralism (RP)?
2. What is the effect of RP on the Great commission?
3. Why bother?
4. Historical Perspective (Global & in the West)
5. Claims of Philosophical Pluralism
6. Can All religions be true?
7. What is Truth?
8. Concluding Remarks

1. Definition

- **Religious pluralism** is the view that all religions, certainly all major religions, offer equally valid paths to God, or to ultimate reality.
- There are only superficial differences among all religions
- Rather than dominating others with our “version of reality”, we should accept all beliefs as equally valid

Definition within our Nation

- After 9/11 Bush called for a National Day of Prayer and encouraged people of all faiths to pray. And two interfaith memorial services were held.
- Sept. 14, 2001 National Cathedral
 - A prayer was offered to...
 - “the God of Abraham, the God of Muhammad, and the Father of Jesus Christ.”
- Oprah Winfrey led the service in New York and boldly declared, “all people pray to the same God.”

2. Effect of pluralism on evangelism

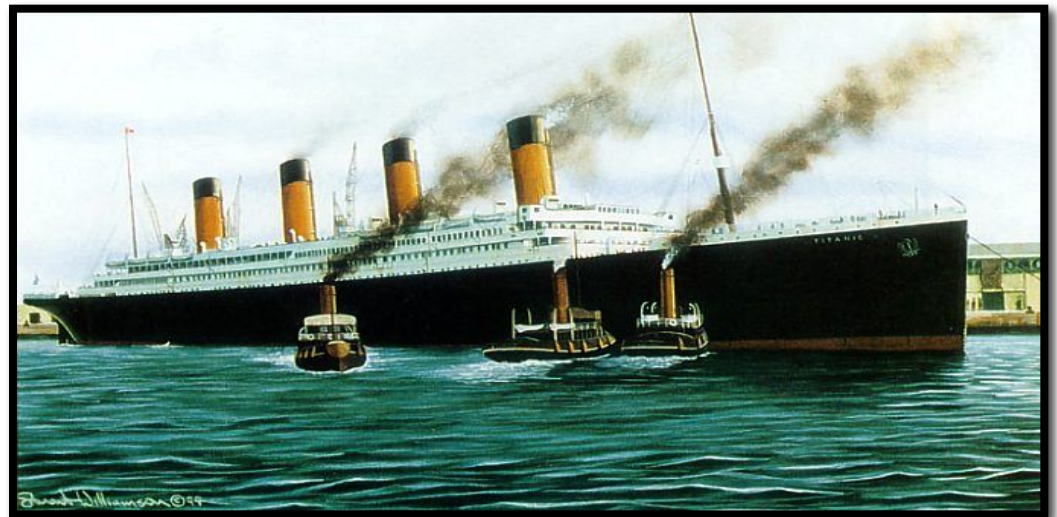
- Evangelism becomes so **unfashionable** on campuses nowadays
- Religious pluralism means that we look at one another's beliefs and in effect say "**I am Ok and you're OK**"
- Remark heard on campus: "I don't think it really makes much difference what you believe as long as a *you're sincere*"

What about those who are sincere?

- Sincerity is not a test for truth
 - You can be sincerely WRONG!

**There is a way that seems right to a man,
but its end is the way of death (Prov. 14:12)**

- **Sincere Belief:**
 - This ship is unsinkable!!



3. Why bother?

- **Commanded to defend our Christian Faith:**
 - “Always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15)
- **Commanded to refute false ideas about God:**
 - “Casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor. 10:5)
 - St. Paul refuted those who opposed the truth:
 - “Holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict” (Titus 1:9)
- **Commanded to discern True from False prophets:**
 - “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1)

4a. Historical Perspective - Global

1st Century 17th Century 19th Century 19th-20th Century 20th Century Late 21st Century

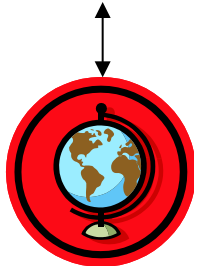
Pre-modern

THEISM

Theism → Deism

GOD

GOD



(Ps. 19:1) The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

Modern

ATHEISM

Naturalism → Nihilism → Humanism

~~GOD~~



(Ps. 53:1) The fool says in his heart, “there is no God”.

Karl Marx (1818 – 1883)
Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939)

Post-modern

PLURALISM

Fill in the blank

New Age, Pantheism

“What works for you”

“Post-modernism

(Judges 17:6) In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.

Friedrich Nietzsche
(1844 – 1900)

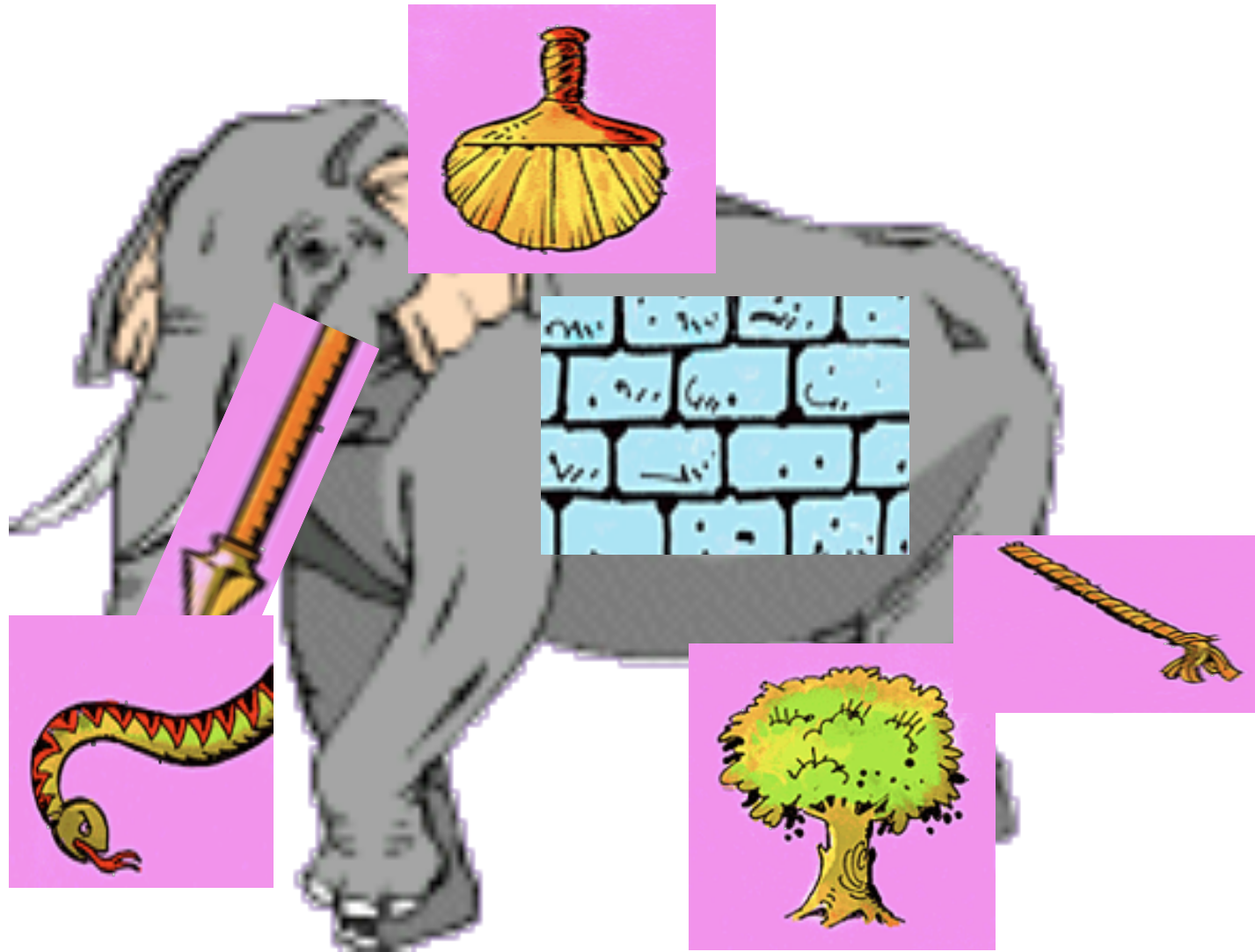
4b. Historical Perspective – In the West

- Multiculturalism → Tolerance of religious expression
- Bill of Rights → the free exercise of religion
- **The Bad news:** all religions are equally true, thus equally valid paths to God.
- The **problem** of this type of thinking:
 - Religions have fundamental and irreconcilable differences
 - Basic logic is violated

5. Claims of Philosophical Pluralism

- Some philosophers of religion argue religious pluralism is tenable if the contradictions among the world's religions are only apparent rather than real.
- Pluralist thinker **John Hick** → The elephant analogy





BUDDHISM



TAOISM

JUDAISM



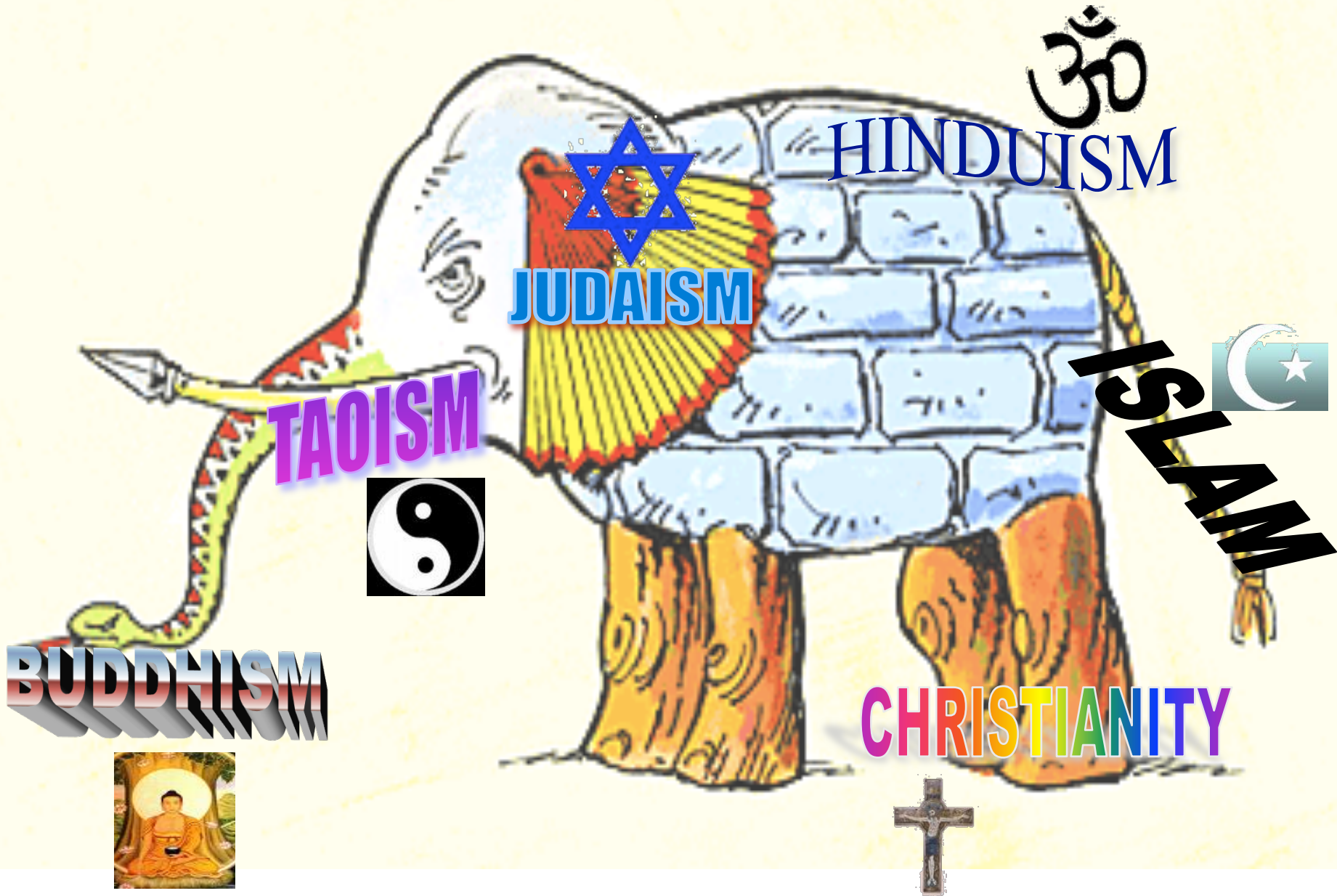
HINDUISM



CHRISTIANITY



ISLAM



The Case for the Elephant story

- **This story is used to illustrate 1 of 2 points:**
 1. Every religion represents one part of the larger picture about God. Each faith has a piece of the truth, ultimately leading to God by different paths.
 2. Cultural biases have blinded us that we can never know the true nature of things. This view is called post-modernism.

The analogy of the elephant fails...

- The analogy overlooks one critical question:
 - How do we know the blind men were all describing the same elephant?
- The pluralist falls into circular fallacy:
 - The pluralist claims to have the one true perspective. He has the “privileged” access to the truth. He must have a full and accurate view of the entire picture.
 - This privileged view is precisely what advocates of religious pluralism refute and deny.
 - To claim that each religion has part of the truth, the pluralist must know what the whole truth is.

More reasons...

- Even though the men are blind, the elephant isn't necessarily mute. This is a factor the analogy doesn't allow for: “**What if the elephant speaks?**”
 - Christianity says that humans do not learn about God by touching blindly
 - Instead, discovery is through **God's own self-revelation**
 - He is not passive and silent, leaving us to guess about His nature
 - God tells us what He is like and what He wants

Philosophical Pluralism

- **Joseph Campbell:**
 - All religions can be simultaneously true because all religions merely make mythical or poetical claims, not historical, factual truth-claims.
- **Orthodox Christianity** proves the opposite

THE BOTTOM LINE

The pluralist believes

everyone is blind

but him!

The Law of Non-Contradiction

- Opposite ideas cannot both be true at the same time and in the same sense.



The Earth is
Round



The Earth is NOT
ROUND

6. CAN all religions be true? 'if they teach opposites!!'

	ISLAM	CHRISTIANITY
GOD	Absolute one	3 persons in 1 essence
HUMANITY	Good by nature	Sinful by nature
JESUS	Major prophet but is not God	Second person of the Trinity (Is God incarnate)
DEATH OF CHRIST	He did not die or rise	He died and rose in glorified body
SALVATION	Good deeds must outweigh bad ones	Working faith in the Lord Jesus Christ

The 3 Major Religious World Views



Judaism

Christianity

Islam

THEISM

God made All

Secular

Humanism

Naturalism

ATHEISM

No God at All

Buddhism

Hinduism

New Age

PANTHEISM

God is All

But all religions are the same: They all teach love

- No religious code matches the **AGAPE** love found in the person of Jesus Christ
- Wrongly assumes if a part is true the whole must be true
- Wrongly assumes “loving one another” is chief end of man “it isn’ t: loving God is”
- Magnifies superficial similarities but ignores essential differences

The “CREED” by Steve Turner

We believe in Marxfreudanddarwin
We believe everything is OK
As long as you don't hurt anyone
To the best of your definition of hurt
And to the best of your knowledge

We believe in sex before during and after marriage
We believe in the therapy of sin
We believe that adultery is fun
We believe that sodomy is OK
We believe that taboos are taboo

We believe that everything is getting better
Despite evidence to the contrary
The evidence must be investigated
And you can prove anything with evidence

The “CREED” – con’ t

We believe there’ s something in
Horoscopes, UFO’ s and bent spoons
Jesus was a good man
Just like Buddha, Mohammed, and ourselves
He was a good moral teacher
Although we think His good morals were bad

We believe that all religions are basically the same
At least the one that we read was
They all believe in love and goodness
They only differ on matters of
Creation, sin, heaven, hell, God and salvation

We believe that after death comes the Nothing
Because when you ask the dead what happens they say nothing
If death is not the end if the dead have lied
Then it’ s compulsory heaven for all
Except perhaps Hitler, Stalin and Genghis Khan

The “CREED” – con’ t

We believe in Masters and Johnson
What’ s selected is average
What’ s average is normal
What’ s normal is good

We believe that man is essentially good
It’ s only his behavior that lets him down
This is the fault of society
Society is the fault of conditions
Conditions are the fault of society

We believe that each man must find the truth that is right for him
Reality will adapt accordingly
The universe will readjust
History will alter

We believe that there is no absolute truth
Except the truth that there is no absolute truth

The “CREED” – con’ t

We believe in the rejection of creeds
And the flowering of individual thought
If chance be the Father of all flesh
Disaster is his rainbow in the sky

And when you hear
State of Emergency!
Snipers kill Ten!
Troops on Rampage!
Whites go Looting!
Bomb Blasts School!

It is but the sound of man worshiping his maker!!!

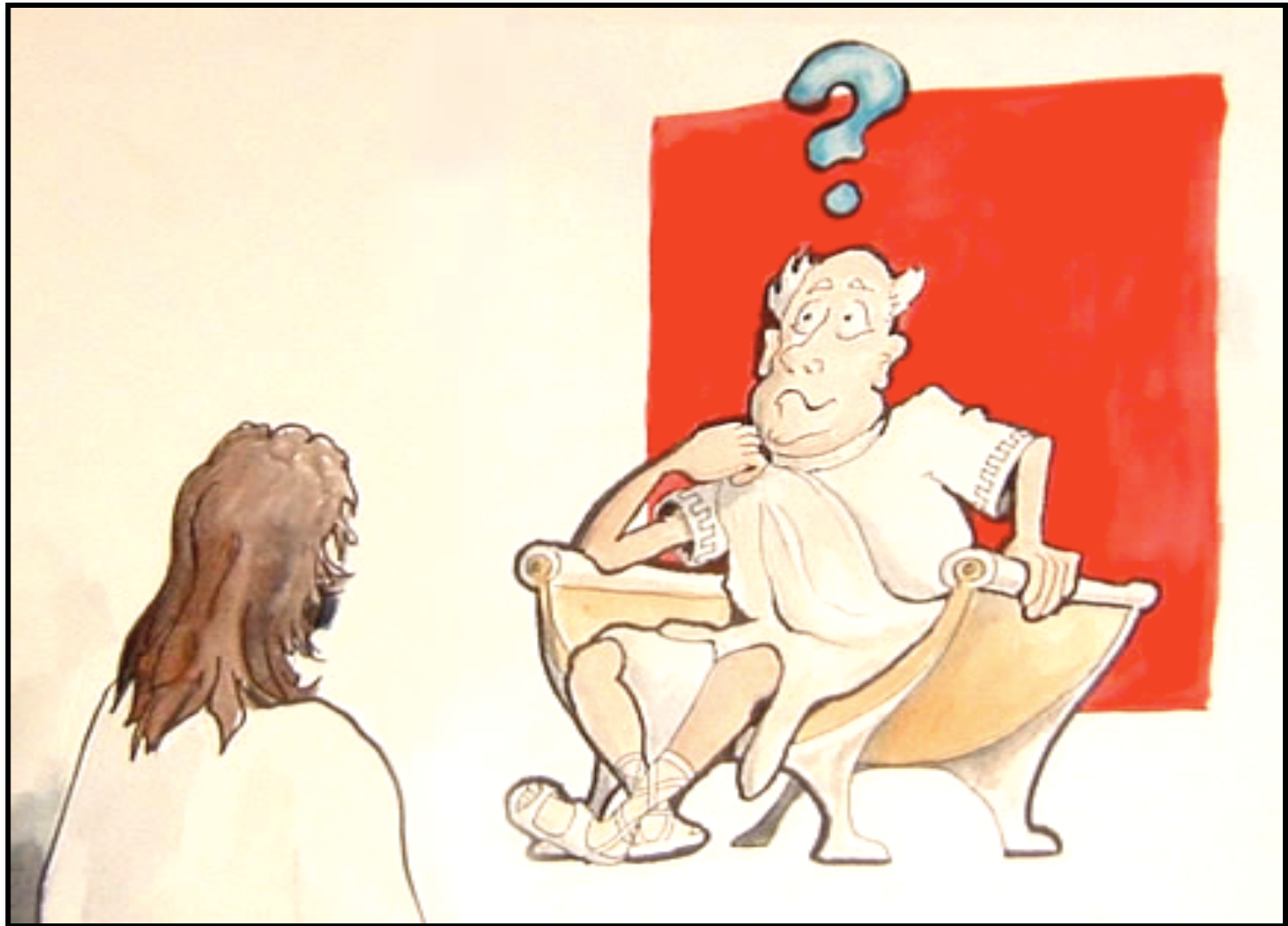
7. What is Truth?



- Truth by definition is exclusive.
- **Christ made a most reasonable claim when he said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** John 14:6 (NIV).

Pontius Pilate asked our Lord

“What is Truth?” (John 18:38)



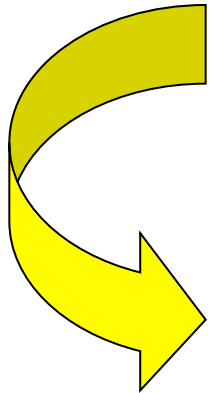
Characteristics of **Absolute Truth**

- Corresponds to reality
- Objective
- Transcendent
- Exclusive
- Absolute
- Has inescapable consequences
- Discoverable
- Saves (2 Thess. 2:10, 1 Tim 2:4, Jn. 8:32)
- The Person of our Lord Jesus Christ

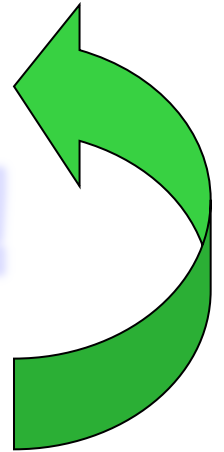
Objections to Objective Truth

1. Truth does not exist
2. You can't know truth
3. Truth is relative
4. No one has the claim for truth

Answering Objections



Simply apply the claim to itself!

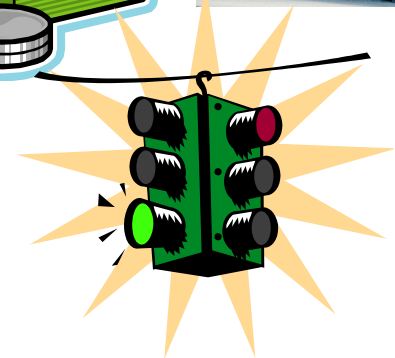
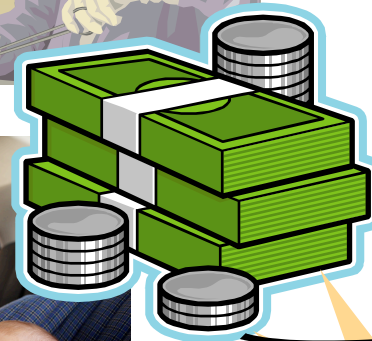


Example...

- There is no Truth
 - Is that statement True?
- You can't know truth
 - Then how do you know that?
- Truth is relative!
 - Is that a relative truth?

People demand **ABSOLUTE** truth when it comes to:

- Safety
- Money
- Medicine
- Relationships
- Transportation



So why not religion/faith/God?

8. Conclusion

- **The real problem** → the attitude of the human race:
 - we want to make the rules
 - we want to create and design our own options
 - we want to dictate our own terms
- **Premise of this world**: there is no God
 - If NO GOD → No absolute truth
 - If NO GOD → there is the individual → each his/her own truth
- We want to construct our own reality and not be compelled to submit to a reality that lies beyond us

If the world suppresses the Truth...

- **Rom 1:18-25**

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and unrighteousness of men who **suppress the truth** by their wickedness, so that men are without excuse...who **exchanged the truth for the lie** and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen

We must declare the truth

We must expose the lie

If the world loves Darkness...

- **John 3:19**

And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and **men loved darkness** rather than light, **because their deeds were evil.**

We are to love the LIGHT

We are to pursue Good Deeds

If the world wants to suit its desires...

- **2 Timothy 4:3-4**

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but **according to their own desires**, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

We make Him our Ultimate Desire