

# WORLD RELIGIONS AND OTHER BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

## CLASS 2: DEISM

### INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

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- The goal of this series is not just to look at all the religions which are out there, but to look at what others believe and how it has infiltrated the church.
- There are many subtle beliefs which have come into the church and have been believed and practiced without regards to their origin or consequence.
- As we look through these various beliefs and systems which are put in place, it would benefit us to notice why they came about, when they came about and what is the overall goal.
- It is by having a better understanding of where people are coming from and where they think they are going that Christians can show them the ultimate truth of Jesus Christ.
- Just like Paul, we can go to the unsaved world, not agreeing with them but acknowledging their desire for religious or spiritual things.
- **Acts 17:22** “So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects.’”
- From this observation, Paul was able to show them who the true and living God was.
- From the onset, it is vital to understand that one cannot be “reasoned” into heaven.
- It is not upon their agreement with you that they are wrong that their standing before God will change from enemy to friend.
- We know that the only truth which can rescue people from their sin is the truth of the gospel.
- **Here is the schedule for the upcoming lessons:**
  - March 2<sup>nd</sup>: Introduction and New Thought / Progressive Christianity
  - **March 9<sup>th</sup>: Deism (God exists but is more of a clockmaker than an involved God)**
  - March 16<sup>th</sup>: New Age Movement / Eastern Mysticism / Animism
  - March 23<sup>rd</sup>: Hyper-dispensationalism / ultra-dispensationalism / KJV only
  - March 30<sup>th</sup>: Universalism / Annihilationism (all are saved and there is no hell)
  - April 6<sup>th</sup>: Moralism / Humanism (as distinct from religion) \**Matt Tomlinson teaching*
  - April 13<sup>th</sup>: Molinism / Middle Knowledge of God (Sovereignty and Free Will)
  - April 20<sup>th</sup>: Resurrection Sunday Celebration–No Class

## INTRODUCTION TO DEISM

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- This morning, we are going to discuss Deism.
- It's important to know about deists as this kind of thinking can unintentionally come into the church and into the believer's mind.
- Many believers can live as though God does not have anything to do with their life.
- This kind of living by professing Christians has been called *practical atheism*.
- This means that while one may profess to believe in God and even be saved, their daily living reflects more of a belief in either a non-existent God or a God who does not really care about "inconsequential" daily living.
- One thing to keep in mind is the *common language* that is shared amongst those who profess to believe in God and those who are truly born again.
- As it has been said before, defining terms before a conversation is very helpful so that both parties are on the same page.

## WHAT IS DEISM OR A DEIST?

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- Deism is the teaching that God exists, that he created the universe and everything in it, but that he stopped being involved in the universe. He is not involved in the lives of people and he does not work in the world in any way. The world is like a watch that has been created, wound up, and is running, but the watchmaker does not touch it anymore. It is to say that God created the universe with everything in it and is letting everything go its natural course without any further intervention on his part. Deism teaches that there are no more miracles and that the Bible is not inspired by God. Therefore, Jesus cannot be God in flesh.<sup>1</sup>
- Another, fuller definition from Noah Webster, 1785 edition:
  - The doctrine or creed of a deist; the belief or system of religious opinions of those who acknowledge the existence of one God, but deny revelation; or deism is the belief in natural religion only, or those truths, in doctrine and practice, which man is to discover by the light of reason, independent and exclusive of any revelation from God. Hence deism implies infidelity or a disbelief in the divine origin of Scriptures.
- There is a belief in a higher power, but that higher power wants little or nothing to do with what he has created.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://carm.org/about-philosophy/what-is-deism/>

- Since in this belief system God has no interaction with man, anything that Christianity has said is from God (the Bible, Jesus, divine revelation, etc.), they do not believe was from God.
  - In fact, Thomas Paine wrote in *The Age of Reason*, published in 1827 “The creation is the Bible of the Deist. He there reads, in the handwriting of the Creator himself, the certainty of his existence and the immutability of his power, and all other Bible and Testaments are to him forgeries.”<sup>2</sup>
- With regards to how God has interacted with creation, this belief is very close to what is called **Theistic Evolution**:
  - The first boundary of theistic evolution states that there is a God, but He was not directly involved in the origin of life. According to this view, God created the building blocks and natural laws with the eventual emergence of life in mind. However, early on He stepped back and let His creation take over. He let it do what it was designed to do, and life eventually emerged from non-living material.<sup>3</sup>
- Many people are deists, they believe that there is something or someone “out there”, but they really have no idea what.
- They put some labels and their own thoughts together and call it their god.

### **What are its origins and inroads into our society?**

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- The term deist first came into usage in the mid-1500’s by a Swiss theologian, Pierre Viret.<sup>4</sup>
- Used again in the early 1600’s by English writer Lord Herbert of Cherbury, he became known as the father of deism.<sup>5</sup>
  - He claimed that “man could use his human reason and other innate human faculties to discover truth, and by extrapolation, God.”
- It was from this writing that came the philosophy of deism.
- Through the wars fought over religion in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, many people began to question the validity of the church and the faith it once preached.
- Rising from the religious wars as an option to biblical faith, deism found its home among the elite of society. So much so, it has been called the “powerful engine of the age of enlightenment.”<sup>6</sup>
- After raging through Europe, its ideologies came to the Americas in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century.
- Men like “Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin embraced deism, or at least were heavily influenced by it. Foremost among American deists was Thomas Paine who, though not a Founding Father, did become

<sup>2</sup> Hodge and Patterson, *World Religions and Cults*, vol. 1, 293.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/theistic-evolution.html>

<sup>4</sup> Hodge and Patterson, *World Religions and Cults*, vol. 1, 291.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 292

deism's primary American evangelist and whose teachings continue to be heralded by deists to this very day."<sup>7</sup>

- The group called The World Union of Deists (founded in 1993 by Robert Johnson) states that the Bible "...paint[s] a very evil and insane picture of God."<sup>8</sup>

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## **How has it infiltrated the church and individual believers?**

- Now under the terminology of *Moralistic Therapeutic Deism* (MTD), it has taken the Christian church by storm and does not show signs of slowing.
- Now a groundbreaking new study from the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University shows that as adults, the under-50 generation still embraces the Moralistic Therapeutic Deism of their formative years. But what was once a rogue belief system that characterized Christian teen culture now permeates both American culture and the Christian church, making Moralistic Therapeutic Deism the most popular worldview in the United States today.<sup>9</sup> (this was done in 2021)
- Munsil explained, "People see themselves as Christians, but these findings show they are actually living out a watered-down, counterfeit worldview that looks more like the culture around them than the biblical Christianity they profess." According to Munsil, "This report is another powerful reminder of the importance of biblical worldview training—at every stage of life. Wrong views about what it means to be a Christian learned in the teen years can still define worldview for adults."<sup>10</sup>
- What is MTD and why is it spreading through churches like wildfire?<sup>11</sup>
  - The term *Moralistic Therapeutic Deism* was first coined by sociologists Christian Smith and Melina Lundquist Denton in their 2005 book *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford University Press). Based on extensive research, they identified the predominant beliefs of American teenagers, even those that claim to be Christians. They named the core beliefs Moralistic Therapeutic Deism or MTD. The five core beliefs of MTD are as follows:<sup>12</sup>
    1. A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth.
    2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other (morally good)

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 293

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.arizonachristian.edu/2021/04/27/counterfeit-christianity-moralistic-therapeutic-deism-most-popular-worldview-in-u-s-culture/>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/Moralistic-Therapeutic-Deism.html>

<sup>12</sup> This list is a combination from the above source and the Arizona Christian study from 2021.

3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself.
4. God places very limited demands on people
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.

- This is moralistic because one is to be good...
- This is therapeutic because people are to feel good about themselves and that is God's job towards us...
- This is a deistic belief because God does exist but is relatively uninvolved in his creation...
  - To be fair, deists have objected to this label since they do not believe that God has any interaction with His creation. They would say this should be theistic.
- No matter what it is called, it is close enough to both, that we should not quibble over what the label is but how far off it is from biblical Christianity.
- Both put man at the center stage of life. Whether it is man who is finding God through his own knowledge or man how is here to be served by God; both fall far from being anything biblical.
- As Barna explained, "Consequently, this approach to spirituality asks little of its followers while providing the comfort, convenience, and community they long for."<sup>13</sup>

## **What is a Theist?**

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- While the scope of this teachings is not about theism, it is helpful to know the distinction between theism and deism.
- In the most general sense, a theist is a person who believes in at least one god or deity. Theism stands in contrast with atheism (the denial of the existence of any god) and agnosticism (the belief that the existence of a God or gods is uncertain). Theism can include any of the following worldviews:<sup>14</sup>
  - **Monotheism:** A monotheist is a person who believes in one God. Monotheism is accepted by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, although each religion has a distinct view of God.
  - **Polytheism:** A polytheist believes in more than one god. Those who believed in the gods of the Greco-Roman culture were polytheists. Today, those who accept the many gods and goddesses of the spirit world would be considered polytheists.
  - **Deism:** Deists believe in a God (or sometimes gods) who created the universe but does not operate within the universe.
  - **Pantheism / Panentheism:** Pantheists and panentheists believe god is all and all is god. Panentheism also includes the idea that a god or gods created the material universe.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.arizonachristian.edu/2021/04/27/counterfeit-christianity-moralistic-therapeutic-deism-most-popular-worldview-in-u-s-culture/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/what-is-a-theist.html>

- **Autotheism:** An autotheist is anyone who makes the claim that he or she is God or an enlightened one.

## **What are the attractions and dangers of deism?**

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- It is a system which has no accountability, except what is good for society.
  - The Bible is not real so neither is sin, Jesus, repentance, etc. In fact, the only thing that really matters is how much knowledge man can gain in his understanding of life.
- There is no relationship with God and man.
  - God has not revealed Himself to mankind, so we are just on our own.
  - God is cold and heartless, there really is no reason to search after Him.
- Evil just is from bad people, random events that have no meaning or purpose.
  - Morality is something which mankind must discover, as it can't be revealed<sup>15</sup>. God is allowing mankind to continue on a path, without intervening.
- Human reason and personal intellect are chief. This puts a man's pride on display and shows what he can do on his own.
  - Science is put well above God and what man can discover is his greatest jewel.
  - As deist Albert Einstein said "I cannot conceive of a personal God who would directly influence the actions of individuals, or would directly sit in judgment on creatures of his own creation...My religiosity consists of a humble admiration of the infinitely superior spirit that reveals itself in the little that we can comprehend about the knowable world. That deeply emotional conviction of the presence of a superior reasoning power, which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe forms my idea of God...I am a deeply religious nonbeliever. This is a somewhat new kind of religion."<sup>16</sup>

## **WHAT IS A BIBLICAL RESPONSE?**

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- It is important to remember that we must keep our responses to those who believe different from the Bible.
- Using the example from Paul's interaction on Mar's Hill (Acts 17:22-34), he preached to them the truth. Even though they did not believe that God's Word was inspired or authoritative.
- We must not veer off the path of the Scriptures, even when people do not believe the Word to be from God.
- But, we must also know that man on his own cannot understand what the Bible has to say. He must be acted upon by an outside source, namely God, to open his eyes and give him understanding.

<sup>15</sup> <https://puritanboard.com/threads/problems-with-deism.77613/>

<sup>16</sup> Hodge and Patterson, *World Religions and Cults*, vol. 1, 308.

## **How close are those who are deists?**

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- What is interesting is that they see around them and know that they did not create what they see. They know that there is a higher power that put all this together.
- **Psalm 19:1** For the choir director. A Psalm of David. The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.
- **Psalm 19:2** Day to day pours forth speech, And night to night reveals knowledge.
- **Psalm 19:3** There is no speech, nor are there words; Their voice is not heard.
- **Psalm 19:4** Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their utterances to the end of the world. In them He has placed a tent for the sun,
- **Psalm 19:5** Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber; It rejoices as a strong man to run his course.
- **Psalm 19:6** Its rising is from one end of the heavens, And its circuit to the other end of them; And there is nothing hidden from its heat.
- **Psalm 19:7** The law of the LORD is perfect, restoring the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.
- **Psalm 19:8** The precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.
- **Psalm 19:9** The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether.
- **Psalm 19:10** They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.
- **Psalm 19:11** Moreover, by them Your servant is warned; In keeping them there is great reward.
- **Psalm 19:12** Who can discern his errors? Acquit me of hidden faults.
- **Psalm 19:13** Also keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins; Let them not rule over me; Then I will be blameless, And I shall be acquitted of great transgression.
- **Psalm 19:14** Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.

## What Bible verses are counter to a deistic point of view?

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- A belief that God has spoken to His people
  - **Hebrews 1:1-2** “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.”
- A belief that God sent Jesus to His people.
  - **1 John 4:10** In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
- A belief that God hears and answers prayers.
  - **Psalms 34:17** The righteous cry, and the LORD hears And delivers them out of all their troubles.
  - **1 Peter 3:12a** For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears attend to their prayer...
- A belief that God orchestrates what happens here on earth.
  - **Psalms 77:20** You led Your people like a flock By the hand of Moses and Aaron.
  - **Psalms 103:7** He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel.
  - **Isaiah 46:9-11** Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.
- A belief that God is far off and unconcerned with His own special creation
  - **Psalms 34:18** The LORD is near to the brokenhearted And saves those who are crushed in spirit.
  - **Psalms 103:13-14** Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.