

Is Religion The Answer To Humanities Problems?

Humans are religious beings.

There is something deep within our hearts and minds that makes us recognise a greater power beyond ourselves.

Even people who have denied that God exists have cried out to God to help or save them when facing death or going through some deep trouble or crisis.

There are hundreds of ways that men and women have tried to express these religious longings and feelings.

Humans have worshipped the sun, moon, stars, idols of wood, stone and metal, birds, animals and fish; humans have worshipped human gods and spirit beings.

Other humans have tried to worship the true God through many kinds of sacrifices, ceremonies, rituals and laws.

Some humans believe that attending church and getting involved in its services and ceremonies is the way to get right with God.

But are such religious activities the answer?

In the previous study we thought about bad news. How the vast majority of people have chosen to live their own way of life.

We have tried to live independently of the God who made us and who loves us.

Because of this, something has died within us.

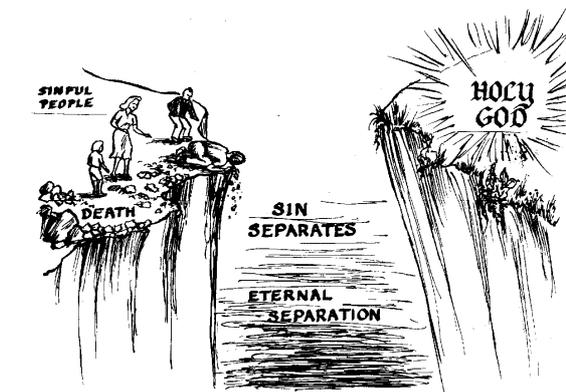
There is now a God-shaped emptiness in us that nothing else can fill.

This rejection of God's rule over our lives has left us in deep trouble.

We have lost our relationship with God and we have lost our way in life.

Isaiah 59:2 [NIV] *“But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.”*

Romans 6:23(a) [NIV] *“For the wages of sin is death,...”*



Turning away from God brings us under His judgement.

If this is true, what can we do about it?

How can I put my life right so that He will not punish me but accept me?

It is at this point of trying to turn towards God that many people go wrong.

People believe there is something **they** can do to cover over their past lives, straighten things out with God and win His favour.

To get right with God they turn to religion.

Religion is **not** the answer.

Religion is a dead-end road that will **not** lead you to God.

All religion depends on our own effort.

Religion is our human attempt to make ourselves right with God.

But any such attempt will fail because even our best efforts are polluted by sin and so are unacceptable to the Holy God.

Isaiah 64:6 [NIV] *“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.”*

This scripture shows the end of our righteous acts.

The Hebrew translated “*filthy rags*” is referring to blood-soiled menstrual cloths.

1 Peter 1:15-16 [NIV] *“But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”*

Matthew 5:48 [NIV] *“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*

God requires perfection, and because none of us are perfect, all our attempts to please God will fail.

We try so hard yet fail so badly.

Our best will never be good enough for God to accept and forgive us for our rebellious sins.

Jeremiah 17:9 [NIV] *“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”*

If we believe that our righteous religious acts please God, we are deceiving ourselves.

Religion can never remove the death penalty of sin.

Romans 6:23 [NIV] *“The wages of sin is death...”*

All the efforts of our sinful rebellious life will only earn us eternal death.

Why?

All the right things we now do will never cancel out all the wrong things we have done in the past.

Turning over a new page will never get rid of all the spoiled pages already written.

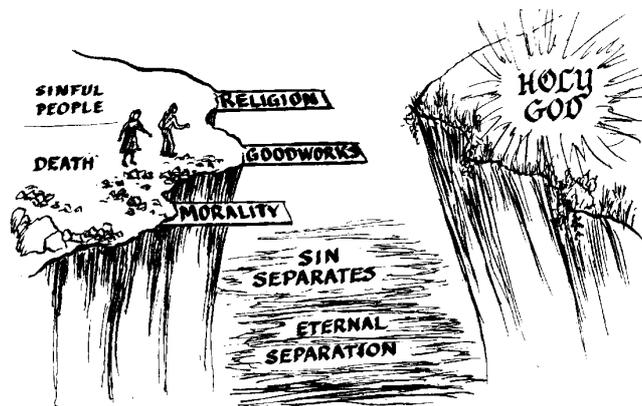
No religious efforts, Christening, Confirmation, Baptism, church attendance, Communion, prayers, good deeds, sacrifices of time and money, Bible reading or anything else can cancel out a single sin or put us right with God.

Though many of these things are good in themselves, we must never rely on them to put us right with God because they are powerless to do so.

Religion can never change our sinful nature.

The root of all our problems is found within ourselves.

We have a sinful nature.



Religion can change our outward behaviour but it cannot change our heart, which is both physically and spiritually the driving force of our lives.

Matthew 7:21-23 [NIV] *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”*

“On that day” refers to the day of judgement.

Jesus is exposing those people who sound religious and do religious things, who think that such a lifestyle will cause God to reward them with eternal life.

Yet Jesus calls them “evildoers”.

Luke 13:22-29 [NIV] *“Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, ‘Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?’ He said to them, ‘Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’ ‘But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’ ‘Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ ‘But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!’ ‘There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.’”*

The Kingdom of God will **not** necessarily be populated by the people we expect to find there.

Some respectable religious leaders claiming allegiance to Jesus Christ will **not** be there because secretly they have not had an intimate relationship with Christ.

Going to church services and taking part in religious ceremonies may make you feel good but they cannot make you good.

Religion is the wrong road to follow.

The only answer is a change of heart and a brand new spirit in life.

What a hopeless position we are in!

Is there nothing we can do then to get out of this deep hole?

Absolutely nothing!

This is truly bad news!

But it is at this point of our total hopelessness that God steps in with the answer.

This brings us to the most wonderful good news in the world.

Something so simple it's almost too good to be true.

Now for the good news

We are separated from God and nothing we can do can ever change that!

But the Christian Bible does **not** end with bad news.

In fact, it is really an account of very good news, and brings a message of hope for all humanity.

There is a way out of the mess we find ourselves in.

John 3:16 [NIV] *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

Because our Creator God loves us so much, He has put in place an amazing rescue plan.

While we could **not** reach Him, God has reached out to us.

Romans 5:6-11 [NIV] *“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, **having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!** Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”*

While we were helpless to save ourselves, God has come to save us from ourselves and our sin-prone nature.

God's rescue plan is centred on Jesus Christ.

God's Word, the Christian Bible, tells us that Jesus of Nazareth who walked the roads of Palestine over 2,000 years ago is our **only** hope of avoiding the wrath of God, that is due because of our rebellious sins.

Jesus Christ is God's answer to our needs and all the world's problems.

There is **no** other way out of our problems and **no** way back to God except through Jesus Christ.

Who was and is Jesus Christ?

The Christian Bible and other historical accounts tell us about the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus travelled around Palestine over 2,000 years ago teaching a new way of life, healing the sick, releasing people from the control of evil spirits, and performing amazing miracles.

Jesus' fame spread and thousands flocked to Him wherever He went.

Who was this Jesus and where did He come from?

Was He just a great moral teacher and miracle worker?

Was He just one of many other prophets who spoke new teaching about God?

Was He just a great religious leader of the past that we should respect and admire?

Or was Jesus Christ more than all this?

Jesus Christ was unique.

Jesus was what He claimed to be, "*the Son of God.*"

Matthew 3:13, 16-17 [NIV] "*Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John.*" ... "*As soon as Jesus was baptised, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."*"

A voice from heaven confirmed who Jesus was.

Matthew 17:1, 5 [NIV] "*After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.*" ... "*While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"*"

It is Jesus the Son of God whom we should listen to.

Matthew 16:13-17 [NIV] "*When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."*"

Revealed as the Son of God by the Holy Spirit to Jesus' disciple Peter.

Mark 15:33-34, 37-39 [NIV] "*At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?", which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ... "With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, "Surely this man was the Son of God!"*"

A hard natured, pagan, Roman soldier recognised Jesus as the Son of God.

Jesus was not only sent by God into the world as a human being, He was God clothed in a human form.

John 1:1-3 [NIV] *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God**. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”*

Who was this person called the Word?

John 1:14 [NIV] *“**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.”*

This person who was the only Son of God became a human being.

Philippians 2:5-8 [NIV] *“Your attitude should be the same as that of **Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God**, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, **being made in human likeness**. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross!”*

Jesus had the very nature of God even though He was in human flesh.

Jesus was and is equal with God.

Philippians 2:9-11 [NIV] *“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

Jesus is not just someone we should respect and admire.

Jesus is the One we should fall down before and worship.

Jesus as the Son of God is the One being we should listen to and obey above all others.

To ignore or reject Jesus Christ is the biggest mistake we can ever make in our life.

Why did Jesus have to end His short physical life dying on a cross?

Jesus came into the human world, as a human being who could die by shedding His life-giving blood.

It is only Jesus' shed blood, the giving up of His perfect God-like life, that can deal with the barrier that separates us from God.

Jesus lived a perfect sin-free life, and went about doing good and expressing the love of God for all human beings, whoever they may be.

Mark 15:9-15 [NIV] *“Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” asked **Pilate**, knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. “What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” Pilate asked them. “Crucify him!” they shouted. “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!” Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.”*

Out of envy the religious leaders of Christ's day not only opposed Jesus but in the end caused Him to be crucified on a cross.

Crucifixion was the Roman penalty for rebellion.

Only slaves and rebellious non-Roman citizens were put to death by crucifixion.

Jesus, who was a sinless and totally subject to God the Father died as a rebel with other rebels.

Why?

The human man Jesus who was also God was the sacrifice for all human beings who will ever exist, being of greater value, beyond human understanding.

Jesus Christ's sacrifice of His life on the cross is the centre of God's amazing rescue mission to save us from the penalty of our sin.

Why did Jesus have to shed His life blood on the cross?

Leviticus 17:11 [NIV] *“For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.”*

The life of every living being is in the blood.

When our heart stops pumping the blood around our body we die.

Hebrews 9:22 [NIV] *“In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”*

Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin.

Remember it was Adam and Eve's rebellious sin against God their Creator that cut them off from the source of eternal life, the *“tree of life”*.

How did God cover the shame of this sin?

Genesis 3:21 [NIV] *“The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.”*

An animal had to give up its life and shed its blood for these skins to cover the shame of Adam and Eve's sin.

I believe this animal was a lamb.

Why?

John 1:29, 36 [NIV] *“The next day John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” ... “When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, “Look, the Lamb of God!””*

John the Baptist recognised Jesus the Saviour of all humanity as the *“lamb of God”*.

Under the Old Covenant that God made with Israel a person who sinned was required to bring a sacrificial offering, a sheep, goat, bull or some other clean animal, to the priest of God to be sacrificed instead of their own life being forfeited.

Leviticus 14:12-14 [NIV] *“Then the priest is to take one of the male lambs and offer it as a guilt offering, along with the log of oil; he shall wave them before the LORD as a wave offering. He is to slaughter the lamb in the holy place where the sin offering and the burnt offering are slaughtered. Like the sin offering, the guilt offering belongs to the priest; it is most holy. The priest is to take some of the blood of the guilt offering and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot.”*

A male lamb’s blood became a covering sin offering.

It is interesting to note where some of the sacrificial blood was placed.

“*Ear*” – all we listen to.

“*Right hand*” – depicting our work.

“*Toe*” – the path we walk in life.

Every aspect of our life needs the cleansing power of Christ’s sacrificial blood.

2 Corinthians 5:21 [NIV] *“God made him [Jesus Christ] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

Jesus Christ, the “*lamb of God*”, became our sin offering.

Jesus Christ shed His blood and died as a substitute for our deserved death because of our rebellious sins.

The good news doesn’t stop at the death of Jesus Christ

Jesus was resurrected from the grave by the Holy Spirit and is alive for ever as our High Priest, an eternal being who intercedes on our behalf on the throne of God.

Hebrews 4:14-16 [NIV] *“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”*

This is the new and eternal office of Jesus Christ, the human Son of Man, but also the Spirit Son of God.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ demonstrated His victory over death, Satan and sin.

There are recorded in the Christian Bible many witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Matthew Arnold, an historian, describes the resurrection of Jesus Christ as one of “*the best attested facts in human history.*”

Sir Edward Clark, a Supreme Court Judge said “*to me the evidence (for the resurrection of Jesus Christ) is conclusive...*”

Matthew 28:1-6 [NIV]; **Luke 24:36-43** [NIV]; **John 20:19-29** [NIV]; **John 21:1, 25** [NIV]; **Acts 1:3** [NIV]; **1 Corinthians 9:1** [NIV]; **1 Corinthians 15:5-8** [NIV].

Matthew 28:16-18 [NIV] *“Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”*”

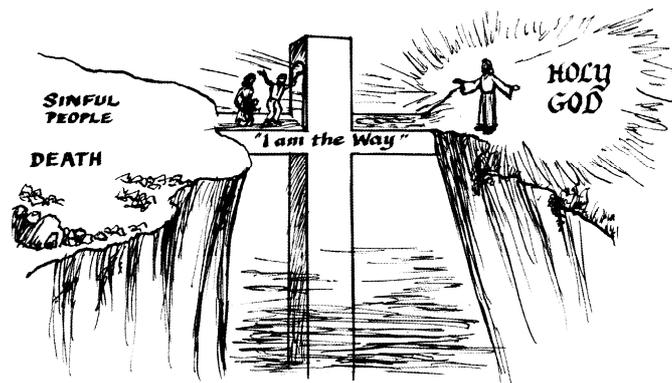
Jesus reigns over the universe as King and Saviour, and is willing to offer the result of His victory over sin, Satan and death to all who will believe in Him and put their lives under His kingly rule.

The life, death and resurrection of Jesus is, therefore, a wonderful story of good news.

God has allowed Jesus to die in our place, to take the penalty and punishment for our sins.

Jesus offers pardon to all who will believe in Him and accept His offer of forgiveness.

Romans 5:9-11 [NIV] *“Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”*



We do not need to stay a rebel!

We do not need to live a life separated from God and under His judgement.

John 15:12-17 [NIV] *“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.”*

Jesus has made a way for us to become His friend instead of His enemy.

Do you want to experience this?

Now please download and study *‘The Mercy of God’* listed under main heading *‘God’* and the series of 10 articles *‘Our Relationship with God’* also listed under main heading *‘God.’* You will be eternally grateful that you did!