

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.

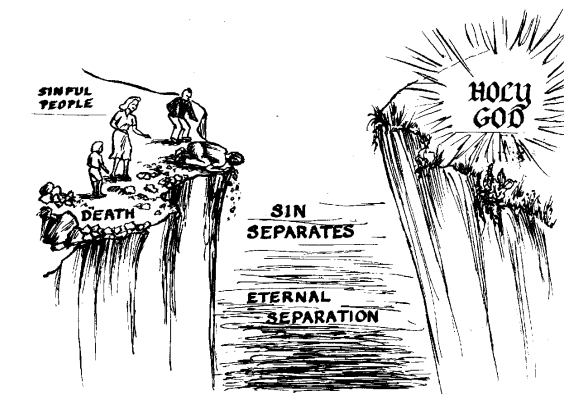
There is now a God-shaped emptiness in us that nothing else can fill.

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.

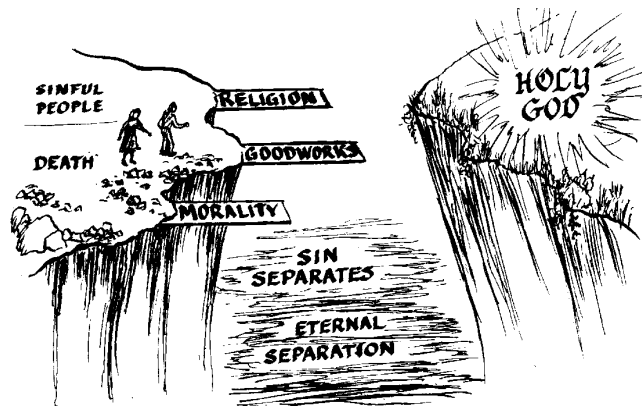
No religious efforts, Christening, Confirmation, Baptism, church attendance, Communion, prayers, good deeds, sacrifices of time and money, Bible reading or anything else can cancel out a single sin or put us right with God.

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.

Memory verse:

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.”*

In the next study we will reveal this good news that is available for all humanity.