

WHAT IS THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT RELIGION?

In Part 13 of the “*Good News From God*” brochure, published by the Watchtower Bible & Tract Society of Pennsylvania, the Society poses four questions: (1) Is all religion good? (2) What is the good news about religion? (3) What should sincere people do? and (4) How will God bring joy to every land?

It is said that religion is so vital that it persists in the absence of learning. It will persist even when it has been contaminated with erroneous ideas and false philosophies. It will persist even when it promotes and encourages acts of violence to accomplish its ‘peaceful’ goals. It will persist even when its beliefs are exposed as nonsensical. The need for religion is so deeply ingrained in the human psyche that it can supercede reason, logic, and even fact.

But religion can also be the most powerful force for good on our planet. When religion allows itself to be disciplined by constructive criticism, amplified by enhanced philosophy, purified by true science, and nourished by loyal fellowship, it can add real meaning and value to our lives, our families, our communities, our nations, even our entire planet. But, most importantly, religion thus refined is the only path to personality survival after human death. No other endeavor dares to make such a bold promise.

For those souls who want more life beyond 70 or 80 years of progressive deterioration, who want more experiences beyond those currently attainable in the human condition, who want answers to life’s most perplexing questions, including “Why are we here?” they have only one option that can satisfy their longings – true religion.

Therefore, fair questions about the nature and destiny of religion itself are relevant. In every age, man must take a fresh look at religion in light of the advances in knowledge and understanding of himself and his universe. Only then can we hope to benefit from our religion rather than be stifled and oppressed by it.

1. Is all religion good?

We need only look around our world to see that all religion is not good. Religion is considered by some to be the ‘opiate’ of the people – meaning that it creates nothing more than fantasies in the minds of struggling men and women to help cope with life. Though this description does not characterize religion as a whole, we must admit that to some extent, this description is accurate.

When religion fails to enhance and enrich the human experience, it is not good. When religion fosters prejudice and intolerance, and stifles creativity and growth, it is not good. When religion ignores true science and belittles beneficial philosophy, it is not good. And, of course, when religion encourages violence, oppression and suppression to accomplish its goals, it is not good.

However, when we inquire about the value of religion, we are not asking whether the **people** who make up a religious group are good or bad. We are fundamentally asking whether its **teachings** are good or bad, beneficial or harmful, healthy or unhealthy. Thus, our inquiry should rightly focus on the leadership, not the rank and file.

For the most part, the individual members of a religion are following the lead of their ‘shepherds’ and they are endeavoring to be ‘good and faithful sheep.’ Religion has become so complicated that the average person is too overwhelmed with the sheer number of different ideologies and charismatic personalities to embark on an in-depth personal investigation. Instead, they entrust their spiritual education and worship into the hands of others whom they cursorily, and often times emotionally, judge to be worthy. As a result, we find people who are easily led into an unhealthful course, though believing they are serving God.

We are certain that if religion’s leaders promoted healthy principles, the membership would likewise be healthy. If religion’s leaders promoted love, tolerance and forgiveness, the people who attend those religions would likewise be loving, tolerant and forgiving. This is why Jesus focused all his criticism of religion on the religious leaders. Never did Jesus condemn the sheep. He pitied them and sought to help them. But to the religious leaders who were not looking out for the best interests of the flock, he had strong words.

“Be on the watch for the false prophets that come to you in sheep’s covering, but **inside they are ravenous wolves**. By their fruits you will recognize them. Never do people gather grapes from thorns or figs from thistles, do they? Likewise every good tree produces fine fruit, but every rotten tree produces worthless fruit; a good tree cannot bear worthless fruit, neither can a rotten tree produce fine fruit. Every tree not producing fine fruit gets cut down and thrown into the fire. Really, then, by their fruits you will recognize those [men].” – *Matthew 7:15-20*

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, **hypocrites!** because you shut up the kingdom of the heavens before men; for you yourselves do not go in, neither do you permit those on their way in to go in.” – *Matthew 23:13*

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, **hypocrites!** because you give the tenth of the mint and the dill and the cumin, but you have disregarded the weightier matters of the Law, namely, justice and mercy and faithfulness. These things it was binding to do, yet not to disregard the other things. Blind guides, who strain out the gnat but gulp down the camel!” – *Matthew 23:23-24*

Clearly, Jesus did not tolerate religious abuse. His own words establish that all religion is not good. But how did the current pitiful state of religion develop among followers of Jesus Christ, who was a proponent of spiritual freedom? A brief look at Christian history sheds light on this question.

When Jesus arrived on the scene back in the first century C.E., the Jews were mired in a religion of rituals and works of law. They needed the approval of their religious leaders in order to feel acceptable to God. Theirs was a **religion of works**. Jesus introduced them to a new form of religion – **religion of the spirit** – which requires the active participation of mind and soul. It removed the apparent wall between man and God, abolished the priesthood, and invited all to approach God as a loving Father who welcomes our personal worship.

All followers of Jesus would be brothers – spiritual equals – with each one being led by God’s spirit. (*Romans 8:14-16*)

“But you do not you be called Rabbi, for one is your teacher, whereas **all you are brothers**. Moreover, do not call anyone your father on earth, for one is your Father, the heavenly One. Neither be called ‘leaders,’ for **your Leader is one, the Christ**. But the greatest one among you must be your minister. Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.” – *Matthew 23:8-12*

Jesus’ religion is interactive with the Father and encourages service to one’s fellow man. It is not consumed with striving for personal salvation, for our salvation is guaranteed by our faith:

“Most truly I say to you, He that believes **has everlasting life**.” – *John 6:47*

(For further discussion of our guaranteed salvation, see [Everlasting Life Now!](#))

Instead, they were given a ministry to introduce others to the teachings of Christ so they, too, would have the potential of salvation.

“But all things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and **gave us the ministry of the reconciliation**, namely, that God was by means of Christ reconciling a world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and **he committed the word of the reconciliation to us. We are therefore ambassadors substituting for Christ**, as though God were making entreaty through us. As substitutes for Christ we beg: “Become reconciled to God.” – *2 Corinthians 5:18-20*

However, after about 300 years of pursuing a religion of the spirit, things changed. History tells us that about this time, the early Christians established a central church that usurped the autonomy of the individual Christian, taking away the disciple-making work and placing it solely in the hands of the church leaders. The individual Christian was relegated to the position of merely an audience member or attendee at the church, and not an active participant in spreading the good news.

Christianity became a **religion of the mind**, which requires only a passive and purely intellectual assent to the authority of the church leaders. By casting their lots in with such religions of authority, they compromised the sovereignty of personality, they debased the dignity of self-respect, and they utterly surrendered the right to participate in that most thrilling and inspiring of all possible human experiences – the personal quest for truth.

Most Christians today find themselves, knowingly or unknowingly, a part of a religion of the mind. This superficial type of religion breeds ignorance and intolerance and is the main reason why religion has such a bad name.

No, all religion is not good. But not because religious **people** are not good. Because many of the **leaders of religions** are not teaching good, healthful, God-like principles. They have abandoned the religion of the spirit and assert a religion of the mind – a religion of ecclesiastical authority – the “weak and beggarly elementary things.” (*Galatians 4:9*)

If religion's leaders would turn to the actual, authentic, plain and open teachings of the Christ, the people would manifest goodness in their lives. Religion's value would soar and many self-professed atheists and agnostics would see the wisdom and value of pursuing a spiritual life, and turn to God.

For these reasons, religion will continue to carry a bad name until one important thing occurs: The populace takes control of their own spiritual lives rather than abandoning it to the self-assumed authority of men. There must be a return to a **religion of the spirit**.

2. What is the good news about religion?

The good news about religion is that it is the sure and only path to personality survival after human death.

“Most truly I say to you, He that **hears** my word and **believes** him that sent me **has everlasting life**, and he does not come into judgment but has passed over from death to life.” – *John 5:24*

True religion is the great liberator of man. It effectively cures man's sense of spiritual isolation and loneliness.

“For where there are two or three gathered together in my name, **there I am** in their midst.” – *Matthew 18:20*

“If you love me, you will observe my commandments; and I will request the Father and **he will give you another helper to be with you forever, the spirit of the truth**, which the world cannot receive, because it neither beholds it nor knows it. You know it, because it remains with you and is in you. **I shall not leave you bereaved**. I am coming to you. A little longer and the world will behold me no more, but you will behold me, because I live and you will live. In that day you will know that I am in union with my Father and you are in union with me and I am in union with you. He that has my commandments and observes them, that one is he who loves me. In turn he that loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and will plainly show myself to him.” – *John 14:15-21*

True religion enfranchises the believer as a son of God, and a citizen of the universe. It assures man that, by accepting his sonship, he is thereby identifying himself with the eternal purpose of the Father. Such a liberated son immediately begins to feel at home in the universe, his universe.

“As for us, **our citizenship exists in the heavens**, from which place also we are eagerly waiting for a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will refashion our humiliated body to be conformed to his glorious body according to the operation of the power that he has, even to subject all things to himself.” – *Philippians 3:20-21*

The good news about religion is that it provides a direct line of communication between man and God by means of His indwelling spirit.

“Do you not know that you people are God’s temple, and that the spirit of God dwells in you?” – **1 Corinthians 3:16**

No more is there a need for priests or human mediators in order to approach the Father in prayer.

“But you, **do not you be called Rabbi, for one is your teacher**, whereas all you are brothers. Moreover, do not call anyone your father on earth, for one is your Father, the heavenly One.” — **Matthew 23:8-9**

Though geographically far away, the Father has provided His Son, Christ Jesus, as ‘the way’ to attain to the presence of the Father.

“Jesus said to him: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” – **John 14:6**

And there is no partiality. The Father does not play favorites. He loves all of us equally, no matter our race, gender or social status.

“At this Peter opened his mouth and said: “For a certainty I perceive that **God is not partial**, but in every nation the man that fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him.” – **Acts 10:34-35**

The good news about religion is that true religion can change the world by means of the spiritual brotherhood of man. Not through religious collectivism, but through the acts of the individual who has been inspired and uplifted by his religion. In this way, religion can serve as a stabilizing force in society, while at the same time, remaining no part of it.

The Bible book of Revelation contains prophecy that many have interpreted to mean that God himself will put an end to false religion. While we do not profess to be able to interpret prophecy at this time, we will leave room for that interpretation.

In the meantime, if we look at what is plain, open and unambiguous, we can see that there is much man can do now to refine religion. Yes, religion can be purified so that we can gain the benefits true religion was meant to bestow, namely a successful earthly sojourn that suitably prepares us for the real life – the heavenly career. (**1 Timothy 6:17-19**)

Though it was thwarted, religion of the spirit is slumbering within Christianity, waiting for a more spiritual age. That time has come. Religion that is backwards and harmful will be a thing of the past just as soon as mankind has the courage to stand up to ecclesiastical oppression and take their rightful place as children of God. It is really quite that simple.

When we recognize that we are all children of God, we are acknowledging that every man is our brother. (**Matthew 23:8-9**) If Christianity had not been usurped by ecclesiastical hierarchy, and returned to the mire (**2 Peter 2:22**), we could have a worldwide spiritual brotherhood by now. A spiritual brotherhood is the cure to everything that ails mankind, including false and

harmful religion. It is the Kingdom of God on earth. The lack of a spiritual brotherhood, after all that Jesus taught, and after all that he has done for us, is reprehensible!

Yes, the good news about religion is that we have the power to change it.

“Not by a military force, nor by power, but by my spirit,”
Jehovah of armies has said.” – *Zechariah 4:6*

3. What should sincere people do?

When we understand the problem, we can more clearly see the solution. Religion is on a bad path because the spirituality of the individual has been usurped and replaced with ecclesiastical authority. Rather than being led by spirit, we are being told by men what to believe, what to do, and what to say. The solution, therefore, is to recapture our spiritual lives, regain our spiritual autonomy, and subject ourselves to the actual, authentic, open and plain teachings of Jesus Christ.

We do this, not by rebelling against authority, but merely by asserting our own, ‘with a mild temper and deep respect’ (*1 Peter 3:2*), confirming in our hearts what we truly believe, and making that truth our own. When we let the Father’s laws be written in our hearts (*Jeremiah 31:33*), we do not need man to teach us how to behave. (*1 John 2:27*)

As practitioners of the religion of the spirit, we will manifest the fruitage of the spirit – ‘love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faith, mildness, and self-control.’ (*Galatians 5:22-23*) By so doing, we eliminate the urge of others to feel they must step up and take control over our spiritual lives.

This does not mean that we should not have spiritual shepherds. ‘Gifts in men’ is a provision of the Christ.

“Wherefore he says: ‘When he ascended on high he carried away captives; he gave gifts [in] men.’ . . . And he gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelizers, some as shepherds and teachers, **with a view to the readjustment of the holy ones, for ministerial work, for the building up of the body of the Christ.**” – *Ephesians 4:8, 11-12*

But as Paul explained:

“What, then, is Apollos? Yes, what is Paul? **Ministers through whom you became believers**, even as the Lord granted each one. I planted, Apollos watered, but God kept making [it] grow; **so that neither is he that plants anything nor is he that waters, but God who makes [it] grow.** Now he that plants and he that waters are one, but each [person] will receive his own reward according to his own labor. **For we are God’s fellow workers.** You people are God’s field under cultivation, God’s building.” – *1 Corinthians 3:5-9*

These spiritual shepherds must recognize the relative nature of their position. They are not lords or masters of our faith.

“Not that we are the masters over your faith, but **we are fellow workers for your joy**, for it is by [your] faith that you are standing.” – *2 Corinthians 1:24*

We can help them along in their role by standing tall as spiritual men and women who take responsibility for our own salvation. After all, when we ‘stand before the judgment seat,’ we will stand alone.

All sincere people should courageously examine their religion to see if it promotes the ideal of sonship as Jesus taught. If it does, continue in that path, growing ever closer to the Father by putting on the mind of the Christ (*1 Corinthians 2:14-16*) and the complete suit of armor from God. (*Ephesians 6:11-18*)

If, on the other hand, we find that our religion is not living up to Jesus’ message of sonship, we can, first, do our part to gain our brothers by spreading this good news to our fellow worshippers, especially those taking the lead. Many of religion’s leaders are humble enough to make adjustments when they are presented with irrefutable scriptural evidence.

But if our efforts at refinement are met with **steadfast** resistance as did the religious leaders in Jesus’ day, we can take the counsel of Jesus himself when he sent forth his apostles with the good news of the Kingdom:

“**Wherever** anyone does not take you in or listen to your words, on going out of that house or that city shake the dust off your feet. Truly I say to you, It will be more endurable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on Judgment Day than for that city.” – *Matthew 10:14*

And if we choose to ‘go out from that city,’ we are assured of the Father’s loving care and protection:

“‘Therefore get out from among them, and separate yourselves,’ says Jehovah, ‘and quit touching the unclean thing’; ‘and **I will take you in.**’ ‘And **I shall be a father to you, and you will be sons and daughters to me,**’ says Jehovah the Almighty.” – *2 Corinthians 6:17-18*

Practicing the religion of the spirit requires faith – faith in the power of God and the certainty of His promises, faith in Jesus’ promise that he would send the Spirit of Truth to be with us and guide us, faith in the power of love to effect real change in ourselves and our communities, and faith in the power of a mere ‘mustard seed’ of faith! We must have a living, active faith based in love, not fear.

For further discussion, see **Freedom of the Children of God, The Mustard Seed, and Ambassadors Substituting for Christ.**

4. How can God bring joy to every land?

The Father has already put in motion a plan to bring joy to every land. It is the ministry of reconciliation:

“But all things are from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and **gave us the ministry of the reconciliation**, namely, that God was by means of Christ reconciling a world to himself, not reckoning to them their trespasses, and **he committed the word of the reconciliation to us. We are therefore ambassadors substituting for Christ**, as though God were making entreaty through us. As substitutes for Christ we beg: “Become reconciled to God.” – *2 Corinthians 5:18-20*

By means of this ministry, the spiritual status and personal dignity of every man, woman and child is elevated. When we understand that this life is meant to be temporary, and that ‘the real life’ exists in the heavens, we are better equipped to cope with life’s vicissitudes. We are better able to understand and apply Jesus’ counsel:

“On this account I say to you: **Stop being anxious** about your souls as to what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your bodies as to what you will wear. Does not the soul mean more than food and the body than clothing? Observe intently the birds of heaven, because they do not sow seed or reap or gather into storehouses; still your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth more than they are? **Who of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his life span?** Also, on the matter of clothing, why are you anxious? Take a lesson from the lilies of the field, how they are growing; they do not toil, nor do they spin; but I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed as one of these. If now, God thus clothes the vegetation of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much rather clothe you, you with little faith? **So never be anxious** and say, ‘What are we to eat?’ or, ‘What are we to drink?’ or, ‘What are we to put on?’ For all these are the things the nations are eagerly pursuing. For your heavenly Father knows you need all these things. **Keep on, then, seeking first the kingdom and his righteousness, and all these [other] things will be added to you.** So, never be anxious about the next day, for the next day will have its own anxieties. Sufficient for each day is its own badness.” – *Matthew 6:25-34*

When the anxieties of earthly life have been lifted, we can go forward boldly as did the apostles and disciples of Christ in the first century, without fear of men.

“With that they called them and charged them, nowhere to make any utterance or to teach upon the basis of the name of Jesus. But in reply Peter and John said to them: “Whether it is righteous in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, judge for yourselves. **But as for us, we cannot stop speaking about the things we have seen and heard.**” – *Acts 4:18-20*

“So they brought them and stood them in the Sanhedrin hall. And the high priest questioned them and said: “We positively ordered you not to keep teaching upon the basis of this name, and yet, look! You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you are determined to bring the blood of this man upon us.” In answer Peter and the [other] apostles said: “**We must obey God as ruler rather than men.**” – *Acts 5:27-29*

It was Jesus’ objective that the true good news of the kingdom be preached to the ends of the earth. (*Matthew 28:19-20; Acts 1:8*) We cannot let our Master down. In this 21st century, we can renew Jesus’ religion of the spirit by allowing ourselves to be guided by the Spirit of Truth, and then spread the message of sonship, which is the good news about religion, throughout our communities, until the Father sees fit to otherwise intervene in our affairs.

“May the God who gives hope fill you with all joy and peace by your believing, that you may abound in hope with power of holy spirit.” - *Romans 15:13*

We welcome your comments.

“Elaia Luchnia”