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THE GOOD NEWS FOR A  
MODERN WORLD

WHAT IS THE  
GOOD NEWS  
ABOUT RELIGION?

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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 supersede 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.

### **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.

“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but **inwardly they are ferocious wolves**. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.”- *Matthew 7:15-20*

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you **hypocrites!** You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.”- *Matthew 23:13*

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you **hypocrites!** You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a 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 are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and **you are all brothers**. And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, **for you have one Instructor, the Messiah**. The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves 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:

“Very truly I tell you, the one who believes **has eternal life.**”–  
*John 6:47*

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

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and **gave us the ministry of reconciliation**: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has **committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors**, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be 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 miserable forces.” (*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 must take 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.**

### **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.

“Very truly I tell you, whoever **hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed 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 two or three gather in my name, **there am I with them.**” – *Matthew 18:20*

“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and **he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth.** The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. **I will not leave you as orphans;** I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”– *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.

“But **our citizenship is in heaven.** And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”  
– *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.

“Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?”– *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 are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher,** and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.”  
— *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 answered, “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.

“Then Peter began to speak: “I now realize how true it is that **God does not show favoritism** but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.”– *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.

“So he said to me, “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: ‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty.”– *Zechariah 4:6*

### **The Reaction of Sincere Worshipers**

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, plain and open teachings of Jesus Christ.

We do this, not by rebelling against authority, but merely by asserting our own, ‘with gentleness and respect’ (*1 Peter 3:15*), 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, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness 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.

“This is why it says: “When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.” ... So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, **to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.**” – *Ephesians 4:8, 11-12*

But as Paul explained:

“What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? **Only servants, through whom you came to believe**— as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. **So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.** The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. **For we are co-workers in God’s service;** you are God’s field, 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 lord it over your faith, **but we work with you for your joy**, because it is by faith you stand firm.” – *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 idea and 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 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 worshipers, especially to 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 was the case with 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:

“If **anyone** will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet. Truly I tell you, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.” – *Matthew 10:14-15*

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

“Therefore, “Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and **I will receive you.**” And, “I will be a Father to you, and you will be **my sons and daughters,** says the Lord 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.

### **The Joy of Religion in Every Land**

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

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and **gave us the ministry of reconciliation:** that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And **he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors,** as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be 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:

“Therefore I tell you, **do not worry** about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? **Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?** And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? **So do not worry,** saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. **But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.** Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”– *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.

“Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, “Which is right in God’s eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! **As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.**”– *Acts 4:18-20*

“The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood. Peter and the other apostles replied: **“We must obey God rather than human beings!”**”  
– *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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.

“I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another.”– *Romans 15:13*

*“Elaia Luchnia”*