

## WHAT IS MAN?

A perplexing question of every age, and especially in our day! With all of our knowledge and scientific progress, people are still not happy or satisfied. We may understand things today that baffled our forefathers, but we still cannot understand ourselves.

Are men and women only animals? If there is no God, then man is only an animal, a physical being. This is a popular view today. We are told that mankind is the product of a mindless process of evolution. If this is so, our greatest needs are physical and material. Such things as prosperity and pleasure are all that matter. If there is no God, then we should “eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” If there is no God, then life has little meaning, and right and wrong are simply what we like or dislike.

But the Bible presents an altogether different and more logical picture. Man is a spiritual being. Man was made by God, and for God, and in the image of God (*Gen 1:27; Prov 16:4*). This does not mean a physical image; it means that you, like God, have a moral and rational nature. You can reason, design, worship, and explore like no other of God’s creatures. You also have a conscience that tells you the difference between right and wrong. Unlike all the other creatures, man alone can know God. The most important thing is to be right with God, and to be accepted of him. If he does exist, death is not the end. Material problems, while not to be ignored, are not the main issue.

If man is so privileged, though, why is he so evil? Why the hatred, bitterness, murders, wars, hostility? Why are we destroying the environment? Why, in a world of plenty, do so many die of starvation? The answer is that man is a “sinner.” Sin has shattered the image of God in man and distorted our knowledge of our Maker.

## WHAT IS SIN?

The essence of sin is to fall short of what God requires of us. The Bible says that we’re all sinners (*Rom 3:23*). Because we have sinful hearts, we deliberately go against what God says. We want our own way. Indeed, our whole lives are spent in rebellion to God. Sin is woven into our very nature.

Is sin a serious problem? There are people today foolish enough to think that sin doesn’t matter. We should “live and let live,” they say. So sin is made the focus of entertainment; it is played with, applauded, and generally looked upon as harmless.

But sin is like a cancer. Crime, cruelty, and vice are only its more extreme symptoms. Sin is seen first in disregard for God, and then spreads to a lack of concern for others. It emerges in the selfishness and greed of ordinary people, and in the breakdown of family life. By our sin, we all contribute to the mess the world is in, and we all suffer because of it. But there is even worse news. God holds us accountable for the way we live our lives. He doesn’t turn a blind eye to our sins, as many think. “We shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ...Every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (*Rom 14:10,12*).

Sin against God has created an unbridgeable gap between you and God (*Isaiah 59:2*). The Bible says that, spiritually, you are “dead” because of your sins (*Eph 2:1*). You can do nothing to bridge this gap between you and a perfectly holy God who cannot tolerate sin. You cannot break down this barrier. How, then, will it be overcome? How can God be approached peacefully? The basic problem is that people don’t take God seriously; nor do they take sin seriously. To them, sin is just a social and moral blemish. So if they think about salvation at all, it’s always in terms of what they can do, by moral or religious effort, to improve their life. This is trying to obtain “salvation by works.”

It seems so reasonable. If I have a problem with sin, I must pull myself together, turn over a new leaf, and change my ways. It sounds good, but it doesn’t work that way. Our problem lies in our fallen nature—what we are. No amount of tinkering with morality or religion can change that nature (*Rom 8:7,8*).

## MAN’S WAY — THE WRONG WAY

God has said clearly in his Word: “Man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ...for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (*Gal 2:16*). No amount of keeping moral rules or religious ceremonies can save you. Why? “There is none righteous, no, not one...there is none that doeth good” (*Rom 3:10-12*). We probably consider this to be a gross exaggeration, because we know people we regard as good. But the Bible speaks from God’s point of view, and there is none “righteous” in his sight, there is none that “doeth good” in his sight. God’s standard of behavior for you is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” and “love your neighbor as yourself” (*Matt 22:37-39*). This is God’s requirement for righteousness. Have you done this? No one

is so perfect as to be acceptable to God. In your heart you know this is true, because God has given us a conscience (*Rom 2:12-16*). Both conscience and the Bible tell us we are “sinners.” No matter how hard you try, you cannot reach the standard that God has set.

Why is man so averse to God? The Bible says “the god of this world” (Satan) has “blinded the minds” of men so that they cannot understand things that relate to God; for these things “are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (*1 Cor 2:14; 2 Cor 4:4-6*).

Physical blindness is a great affliction. The color of the sunset, or the beauty of a mountain range can never be appreciated by one who is blind. So it is with spiritual blindness. Spiritual reality is there, but you cannot comprehend it. Perhaps even as you read this, this talk of God, sin, salvation, eternity, and so on, makes no sense to you. Your great need, therefore, is for spiritual sight, for God to open your eyes so that you can see with your mind and trust with your heart.

## THERE IS A WAY THAT SEEMS RIGHT

Many people have difficulty with the idea that Jesus Christ is the unique and exclusive way to God. They believe such claims are bigoted and intolerant. Surely, they say, there must be many ways that people can come to God. They picture life like a mountain, with many paths leading to its summit. God is on the mountain peak, and it does not matter which path people take—the Christian path, the Muslim path, the Hindu path, or even the atheist path—all will eventually lead to God as long as people are sincere.

God’s Word says, “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (*Prov 14:12*). This “way” is the path a person takes through life—your beliefs, behavior, attitudes, and concerns. The most important thing about a way is where it goes. The person who chooses a way of life without knowing where it leads, the Bible calls a “fool” (*Luke 12:16-21*).

But the words “seemeth right” suggest a degree of sincerity. You may not deliberately be going the wrong way. You may see no harm or danger in your chosen path. It seems all right. Surely you cannot be blamed if you do what you think is right? But if you ignore what God has said, you can and will be blamed, in spite of your sincerity. We like to think there are many choices open to us in life. In one sense, this is true. We can choose a career, where to live, whom to marry, how to spend our money, and so on. But concern-

ing a way to God, there is only one right choice: “I am the way,” Jesus said. (*John 14:6*) There are only two “ways” that men are traveling, and these have very different destinations: “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (*Matt 7:13,14*).

## GOD’S ANSWER — THE RIGHT WAY

Think of it like this. Some restaurants insist on a certain standard of dress and refuse to allow a man in if he is not wearing a coat and tie. Customers may object, but the proprietors have a perfect right to maintain their standards. However, as businessmen, they do not want to turn customers away. So when a man is refused admission, they will then say, “Don’t go away, sir. We will provide you with a coat and tie.” Once this is provided and put on, the standard is met and there is no barrier to admission. The restaurant has set its standard, but then provides its own answer for those who fall short of it.

Christ gives a similar illustration in Matthew 22:11-14. A man was found at a wedding not wearing the special garment provided for every guest by the host. Because he did not meet the dress-standard required, and refused to accept the host’s provision, he was thrown out. Perfect righteousness is the standard God has set for entry into his presence. That effectively bars us all. But the gospel, the “good news,” is that God has met his own requirement, and provides the perfect garment for us, namely, the righteousness of Christ (*Rom 3:22; Phil 3:8,9*).

Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ (*Eph 2:8,9*). The word “salvation” means different things to different people. To some it refers to being rescued from things like alcoholism or drug abuse. For others it means economic or social deliverance, like being saved from poverty and deprivation. But when the Bible speaks of being “saved” it means to be delivered from the guilt and punishment that your sin deserves and from its ruling power in your heart. This salvation is offered to you as a free gift of God’s grace. You don’t deserve it; you don’t pay for it; and you can’t earn it—it’s free! (*Isaiah 55:1*).

Many prophecies in the Old Testament, written hundreds of years before Christ came, were fulfilled in detail by his life and death. The prophecies tell us, for example, that the Messiah would be born of a virgin (*Isaiah 7:14*) in Bethlehem (*Micah 5:2*), that he would

ride into Jerusalem on a donkey and be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver (*Zech 9:9; 11:12*). Jesus said that he would be killed and rise again on the third day (*Matt 20:19*). The Bible makes many remarkable claims about Jesus. It says that he is the Son of God (*John 3:18*). He is also God (*John 1:1*). He is sinless (*Heb 4:15*). He performed miracles (*Matt 14:13-36*). He raised the dead to life (*John 11*). He himself rose from the dead (*Matt 28:6*).

In fact the entire Bible is about the Lord Jesus Christ: who he is, what he did, why he did it, where he is, and what he is going to do (*Luke 24:27*). The people who lived with Jesus and observed his life at close quarters, took his claims very seriously. Otherwise, they would not have recorded his teaching and miracles as absolute truth, as they did in the New Testament writings. It is surprising that modern man so easily dismisses both Jesus and the New Testament as a myth. Yet those who saw what he did and heard what he taught were willing to die for him.

The good news of the gospel is that when Jesus died on the cross, "He bare the sin of many" (*Isaiah 53:12*), and saved them from God's anger against sin and the judgment they deserve. Christ alone was innocent of sin and could die as a Substitute for sinners. He stood in their place and stead and took the punishment that should have been theirs. The angel said, "Call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (*Matt 1:21*). He died "the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (*1 Peter 3:18*). His death not only turns away God's anger, but also reconciles to God all of those that the Father had given him (*John 6:37; 17:2; 2 Tim 1:9,10*). Jesus is God's way of salvation, which is why he is the only way.

Different religions are not simply different paths to the same God. Jesus Christ is unique. He claimed to be the only way to God, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (*John 14:6*). He is no ordinary person. He is God become man. He left heaven to seek and save the lost. He died an agonizing death on a Roman cross. But Christ's greatest suffering did not lie in the physical pain, but in the condemnation he endured from God his Father, as he bore the sins of all of those who would put their trust in him: "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (*1 Peter 2:24*). At the cross God's wrath fell upon his Son instead of us.

The cross was God's supreme act of love and grace. At the cross we see God, in all of his holiness, dealing with human sin. At the cross, God charges our sin and guilt to

Christ; and when we look to Jesus by faith believing that his blood alone must cleanse us, and his spotless garment alone must clothe us, God charges his righteousness to us. God "made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (*2 Cor 5:21*). God's own Son satisfied all of his requirements. Divine justice could demand no more; he paid the debt in full. Now we read: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (*Acts 4:12*).

### DO YOU WANT TO BE SAVED?

Christ now welcomes sinners: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (*Matt 11:28*). We come to Christ by realizing that we're guilty and do not deserve to be pardoned. To come to Christ means to believe in Jesus as God's only answer to deal with your sin and to provide pardon for guilty sinners. It means to trust what he did on your behalf on the cross and look to him alone for forgiveness and salvation.

Becoming a Christian is not merely taking up a new interest or hobby, or joining a club. Your desire to be a Christian must become the most important thing in your life. Such a desire will not be created by a casual interest, but only by God working in your heart and mind. You cannot make yourself a Christian. You may call yourself a "Christian," but that's not the same as actually being one. This is because of what a Christian is. A true Christian is a "Christ-person"—one who loves the Lord Jesus Christ and follows him (*John 10:27,28*), living according to his teachings and example. But this is contrary to all that you are by nature. So to become a Christian, your nature must be changed; and only God can do that.

The prophet of old said, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (*Isaiah 55:6,7*). There was one who asked, "What must I do to be saved?" The answer was given: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (*Acts 16:30,31*). To believe in Jesus is to believe in the power and love of Christ that he is able and willing to save you. Believing in him means actually putting your trust in Christ, relying upon him alone to make you right with God. To believe in

Jesus is to see his shed blood as your only cleansing before God. To believe in Jesus is to trust in his righteousness alone as your only hope of standing pure and righteous in God's holy presence.

Your proud, sinful nature will fight against abandoning trust in your own righteousness or religion. Yet you have no alternative. You must stop trusting in "the best that you can do," and trust only in Christ. This is what it means to "look unto Jesus and be saved" (*Isaiah 45:22*)—you stop looking to yourself. Confess that you're a guilty, lost, and helpless sinner; and with all of your heart ask Christ to save you. Plead with him as did the publican: "God be merciful to me a sinner" (*Luke 18:13*). Surrender your whole self to him as Lord of your life, that he may enable you to turn from sin and live for him. He has promised, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (*John 6:37*). □

— Peter Jeffery

### TOMORROW!

*"Boast not thyself of TOMORROW; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth"*  
— Proverbs 27:1

*He was going to be all that a mortal should be*  
**TOMORROW.**

*No one should be kinder or braver than he*  
**TOMORROW.**

*A friend who was troubled and weary he knew,  
Who'd be glad of a lift and who needed it too;  
On him he would call and see what he could do*  
**TOMORROW.**

*Each morning he stacked up the letters he'd write*  
**TOMORROW.**

*And thought of the folks he would fill with delight*  
**TOMORROW.**

*It was too bad, indeed, he was busy today,  
And hadn't a minute to stop on his way;  
More time he'd have to give others, he'd say,*  
**TOMORROW.**

*The greatest of workers this man would have been*  
**TOMORROW.**

*The world would have known him, had he ever seen*  
**TOMORROW.**

*But the fact is he died and faded from view,  
And all that he left here when living was through  
Was a mountain of things he intended to do*  
**TOMORROW.**

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## Which way to God?

There are so many religions with so many different teachings, all claiming to point men to God. We must take care when searching for God and considering the source of life and its purpose. Some think choosing a religion is like choosing goods at the supermarket. "You have all these brands to choose from," they say, "so just take the one that suits you. After all, they're all much the same, aren't they? I like Jesus, you like Allah, someone else likes Buddha; it doesn't really make any difference." But do all religions lead to God? If they did, that would mean that religious teachings that completely contradict each other are all true. Such could never be. We would never accept such a thing in any other area of life, so why accept it when it comes to the question of eternal life.

### WHO IS GOD?

Some people deny God's existence. Others say there may be a God but it's impossible for us to know him. But most people believe there is a God, a Supreme Being. Their problem is that they know so little, if anything, about him. For us to believe in a Supreme Being, though, and never truly know this One, would be like believing in happiness and never wishing to experience it.

God tells us about himself in the Bible, "the Word of God." There we find that God is gloriously and wonderfully unique (*Isaiah 46:9*). There never was a time when God did not exist (*Psalms 90:2; John 17:5*), for he created time and space and everything in them. If there had been no God, there would have been no universe, no world (*Rev 4:11*).

God is not like anyone or anything else. He has warned us against making up our own ideas about him. "To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal?" (*Isaiah 40:25*). God accuses us of thinking that he is like us: "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself" (*Psalms 50:21*). "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (*Isaiah 55:9*). God is unchanging and ever-present (*Isaiah 45:21; Mal 3:6; Psalms 139:7-10*) and absolutely holy (*Exodus 15:11*). Because he is holy he will not, and cannot, tolerate sin. That creates an immense problem for each one of us.