

exposed quite well by C. S. Lewis, “You cannot go on explaining everything away forever, or you will find yourself explaining away explanation itself.” Still, people try – w/o success -- to explain away God.

Postmoderns say, “All claims about God are nothing more than power plays people use to control other people.” [Karl Marx said something similar...] So we ask: “If ALL claims about God are nothing more than power plays, does that include YOUR claim about God?”

Freud said, “ALL claims about God are psychological projections to help us deal w/our issues of guilt and insecurity.” WE ask: “So are YOU saying YOUR claim that there IS no god relieves YOU of guilt / makes you feel secure?”

Evolution. Evolution says, “Your belief in God is something just hardwired into your brain . . . you believe like you do b/c of those neuro-chemical exchanges going on inside your brain.” WE ask: “If then HOW do you explain what’s going on in YOUR brain?”

Postmodernism / Secular Psychology / Evolution ... all trying to explain away what may be the most offensive **Vs** in the Bible: **Genesis 1:1!** Yes, there IS a Sovereign Creator God. & Yes, EVERYTHING in the universe — the planets, stars, laws of physics, the laws of morality, you, me — everything was *created* by God, *designed* by God, *given value & definition* by God. Yes, ALL religions believe in an ULTIMATE Reality.

- **All 3 believe there’s a GAP between That ULTIMATE REALITY and US (or not).** God is THERE . . . WE are HERE . . . There’s a GAP. So HOW do we get OVER that GAP to GOD? What BRIDGE do we cross to get to God?

In “religion,” The ANSWERS are Legion, for they are MANY. SOME religions like Eastern Religions & new age religions as well as modern “spirituality” say, “WHAT GAP? Just GO INSIDE YOURSELF / tap into the DIVINE deep inside of you. Just ACCESS your godhood.” That’s the religion of the Human Potential movement, the religion of Oprah. Dig deep & you’ll find God.

But MOST religions tell you GOD is THERE →, YOU are HERE ←, & there’s SOMETHING *you* must DO in order to get to God. Some work, some ritual, some incantation, some expected behavior, something YOU MUST DO to Get to God.

In ancient Middle Eastern Cultures, e.g. Babylonians, there’s steps you ascended to work your way up to God. That’s what the Tower of Babel was in **Genesis** – Ziggurat -- an attempt to work your way up to God, to get to the divine. Same goes for the Myna temples in South America. In Greece, the gods lived on top of Mount Olympus. & to get to God, YOU have to ASCEND the mountain.

For “spiritual” people, getting in touch with “ultimate Reality” means getting in touch with your feelings, your “inner whatever,” or tapping into the divine that is at the core of who you are.

In the Bible, the JEWS believed there was ONLY ONE ULTIMATE REALITY behind & beyond everything that exists. This ULTIMAE REALITY is a PERSON. A PERSON w/a NAME: YAWEH, the LORD, the GOD of the COVENANT. AND the JEWS believed there was a GAP between THIS GOD & US . . . a gap that needed to be BRIDGED to have a PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP w/God.

2. There’s a CRUCIAL DIFFERENCE between the 3 terms.

Hebrews 8:1-2, 7-13 understand the UNIQUE DISTINCTION of Christianity to “religion” and “spirituality”, we need to focus on **some phrases: “High Priest” / “Old Covenant” / “New Covenant”.**

- **1st, “Old Covenant” Vs “New Covenant”.** What it is and what’s the difference between Biblical religion and other religion . . . and why a “covenant” is needed.

In the Bible, a **“COVENANT”** is a word that describes what GOD has done to bridge that Gap. & w/“**COVENANT,**” we begin to see the DIFFERENCE between the RELIGION of the BIBLE and EVERY OTHER RELIGION in the world.

You see, OTHER religions believe in an ULTIMATE REALITY. In “spirituality,” since you’re your own god, there’s no gap. But, RELIGIONS believe there’s a GAP between that “UR” & humanity. But there’s only ONE RELIGION where GOD takes the INITIATIVE to BRIDGE THE GAP. In the Bible, instead of US working our way TO God →, God comes ← to US.

The STORY of the Bible BEGINS w/intimacy between God & man. Then **Genesis 3** happens. But keep reading . . . Here’s . . . as Paul Harvey used to say, “. . . the REST . . . of the story...” As we eavesdrop on the action in the Garden, Look: Why, there’s the Lord God, & wait: THIS God is PURSUING those 2 sinners. Look again. God is PROVIDING animal skins to cover the SHAME of their nakedness. Those 2 sinners are COVERED – given a STAY OF EXECUTION. But WHY? B/c ANIMALS were KILLED in their place! From that moment on in the Grand Narrative of Scripture, having a PERSONAL BINDING RELATIONSHIP w/the Lord God would REQUIRE the shedding of BLOOD.

As we move through this story in the OT, we see a place: TABERNACLE / TEMPLE. TABERNACLE was mobile, a LARGE TENT. TEMPLE was a PERMANENT BUILDING. Once again, in the TABERNACLE / TEMPLE, we see God COMING DOWN to dwell w/His people, FILLING the TABERNACLE, the TEMPLE w/His GLORIOUS PRESENCE.

But God NEVER let His people forget that the ONLY REASON He would come down & have a PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP w/His people is B/C of something SIGNIFICANT happening INSIDE the Tabernacle / Temple: SACRIFICE. But WHY sacrifice?

Here’s why. Friends, SIN – ANY sin – your sin/my sin -- ALL sin is a BIG DEAL to God. Sin deserves DEATH / BANISHMENT from God’s presence. But GOD has INITIATED a PLAN of restoration. HERE’s the plan: For a SINNER to be RESTORED into FELLOWSHIP & FAVOR w/a totally JUST, completely HOLY God, SOMEONE has to be PUNISHED.

In the OT, in the temple, in that place where GOD met w/His people, our HOLY, JUST, GRACIOUS GOD gives US SINNERS a WAY of RESTORATION. Here’s the WAY: GOD PROVIDES a SUBSTITUTIONARY SACRIFICE so the PUNISHMENT WE DESERVE for sin would NOT fall on US ... but on the SACRIFICE.

In the OT, the daily reality in the Temple was 1,000’s of sheep slaughtered IN THE PLACE OF sinners. WHY? To RESTORE the relationship. Bible says, Apart from the shedding of blood, there is NO PERSONAL BINDING RELATIONSHIP between God & us sinners.

So what IS a COVENANT? **A COVENANT is a PERSONAL BINDING RELATIONSHIP between GOD and HIS PEOPLE. ** & b/c sin deserves death, a COVENANT is a BOND in BLOOD!

When this passage speaks of the **OLD COVENANT**, that’s the arrangement. There’s a RELATIONSHIP God initiates. There’s a TEMPLE where the GAP is closed to make that RELATIONSHIP happen. In the temple, God required sacrifice after sacrifice after sacrifice to deal w/SIN so people can have a PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP w/God.

To put it ANOTHER way, in the OT, SIN is a BIG STAIN in the fabric of our life ... a STAIN that had to be taken every day to the LAUNDARY (temple), so the sin stain can be WASHED AWAY by a WHOLE BUNCH

of animal sacrifices. But then, the stain would re-appear the next day, & the whole process would be repeated, again & again & again.

In this **OLD COVENANT** system of SACRIFICE, there was a KEY PLAYER. The KEY PLAYER was a man known as "**the HIGH PRIEST**" = **2nd phrase**. What the HIGH PRIEST did was, HE ALONE & NOBODY ELSE offered sacrifices for the sin of God's people AND for HIS OWN sin. After all, the PRIEST was a sinner just like everybody else.

& as the blood from all those slaughtered sheep cascaded out the back on the Temple down into the brook Kidron, so the sins of the high priest & the people were symbolically carried away in that flood of blood. Until next time. Then the priest would get up early in the AM, & the whole process would begin again, again, again. In fact, the HIGH PRIEST was SO BUSY on his feet offering sacrifices for sin that He didn't even have time to sit down! There were NO SEATS in the Temple B/C the work of the PRIEST was NEVER completed!

Friends, in a nutshell, that's how **the OLD COVENANT** worked. That's how **RELIGION** was done in the OT. That's how **the GAP** between a holy God & sinful people was bridged. UNTIL . . . UNTIL Jesus came.

Then, when JESUS came, **2 very significant CHANGES** happened.

- **1st, JESUS became the TABERNACLE**, the TEMPLE, the PLACE where the FULLNESS of God's glory dwelled. **John 1 . . .** So there's NO NEED for a temple anymore.
- **2nd, "High Priest", specifically JESUS became the FINAL HIGH PRIEST** who offered up HIMSELF as the FINAL SACRIFICE for sin. But not for His OWN sin. Jesus was w/o sin. No, friends, THIS High Priest offered up HIMSELF *as a substitute -- in the place of His people* -- as the FINAL SACRIFICE for OUR sins. [*Bearing shame . . .*]

& how do we know it's the FINAL SACRIFICE? On the cross, "**It is FINISHED.**" & now, **Vs 1 . . .** Jesus is SEATED. That means His work as the sacrifice-offering Priest is COMPLETE! NEVER to be repeated again like in the OLD COVENANT. Beloved, b/c of what JESUS has done FOR HIS PEOPLE – B/c of the FINAL BLOODY SACRIFICE of Christ for the sins of HIS PEOPLE, now EVERYONE who trusts in Christ's sacrifice is PERMANENTLY BOUND to God FOREVER. This PERMANENT BINDING Jesus secured for HIS PEOPLE through HIS BLOOD is called **THE NEW COVENANT!!!**

So what IS the relationship of CHRISTIANITY to RELIGION? Here it is:

***** CHRISTIANITY is all about JESUS, and JESUS is the FULLEST EXPRESSION of what TRUE RELIGION is all about. *****

Friends, @the end of the day, TRUE RELIGION is NOT about what YOU DO to get right w/God – to EARN God's favor. In fact, IF it's about YOU and what YOU do, it's the very essence of FALSE religion. And Jesus DID confront and very much opposed self-righteous religious works as a means of "bridging the gap" with God. If YOU or ANYTHING YOU DO is an effort to "bridge the gap," then you have become your own savior! Same thing for "spirituality". It's something YOU do. TRUE RELIGION is about WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR YOU through the life, death, & resurrection of JESUS. [Horatius Bonar, "Upon a life I DID NOT LIVE, upon a death I DID NOT DIE; ANOTHER's Life, ANOTHER's Death, I stake my whole eternity."]