

Jesus is Greater: A study of Hebrews

Week Twelve

The Day Religion Died

Hebrews 8:1-13

Pastor Steve Treichler

March 21st, 2021 (8:30 and 10:30am), FB Live (10am)

For His Glory and our joy!

TEXT:

Hebrews 8:1-13

¹Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, ²and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.

³Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. ⁴If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already priests who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. ⁵They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: “See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.” ⁶But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.

⁷For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. ⁸But God found fault with the people and said:

“The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. ⁹It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord. ¹⁰This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ¹¹No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹²For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” ⁿ

¹³By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.

Message Notes:

Introduction – “*Karma, baby*”

Review so far:

Jesus is all that!!

Jesus > OT Prophets

Jesus > Angels

Jesus’ Gospel > Old Testament Law

Jesus = 100% Human

Jesus = 100% God

Jesus > the situations OT prophets wrote about

Jesus > Moses

Jesus’ Salvation > Moses’ Exodus

Jesus’ Rest > Moses’ Promised Land

Jesus > all previous priests

Today’s Message:

The Day Religion Died

Hebrews 8:1-13

A New Priest is in town

Hebrews 8:1-2

Better than the old Priesthood

Hebrews 8:3-5

A New Deal is in town

Hebrews 8:6

Better than the old one

Hebrews 8:7-13

Four ways the new covenant is better:

God’s ways are on our very being (8:10)

God is accessed (8:10)

God is known and for all (8:11)

Sins are forgiven and not remembered (8:12)

The Day Religion Died:
Why was Jesus seated?

Two aspects to religion:

1. There is a capital R reality that is beyond us
2. There is a gap between us that needs bridging

How Jesus kills religion:

“That’s the reason why it says he’s seated. Do you know why he’s seated? All religious work is done. Jesus Christ is saying, “I conclude the work of religion.” Bringing God over to us and us to God, “It’s over. I have concluded it. I have finished it. Religion is finished. You don’t need it anymore.” He’s the final temple to end all temples. He’s the final Priest to end all priests. He’s the final King to end all kings. He’s also, of course, the final sacrifice to end all sacrifices.”

~ Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013)

Is Religion Dead in your life?

| Religion Says: | The Gospel Says |
|--|---|
| I obey - therefore I’m accepted. | I’m accepted - therefore I obey. |
| I obey God in order to get things from God. | I obey God to get to God-to delight and resemble Him. |
| When I am criticized I am furious or devastated because it is critical that I think of myself as a ‘good person’. Threats to that self-image must be destroyed at all costs. | When I am criticized I struggle, but it is not critical for me to think of myself as a ‘good person.’ My identity is not built on my record or my performance but on God’s love for me in Christ. I can take criticism. |
| My self-view swings between two poles. If and when I am living up to my standards, I feel confident, but then I am prone to be proud and unsympathetic to failing people. If and when I am not living up to standards, I feel insecure and inadequate. I’m not confident. I feel like a failure. | My self-view is not based on a view of my self as a moral achiever. In Christ I am “ <i>simul iustus et peccator</i> ”—simultaneously sinful and yet accepted in Christ. I am so bad he had to die for me and I am so loved he was glad to die for me. This leads me to deeper and deeper humility and confidence at the same time. Neither swaggering nor sniveling. |

Gospel Application – Is Religion Dead in your life?

- *Why do you obey God?*
- *How do you handle criticism*
- *Where does your self-view come from?*

Quotes (used or referred to):

Bono Quote

You see, at the center of all religions is the idea of Karma. You know, what you put out comes back to you: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, or in physics; in physical laws every action is met by an equal or an opposite one. It's clear to me that Karma is at the very heart of the universe. And yet, along comes this idea called Grace to upend all that "as you reap, so you will sow" stuff. Grace defies reason and logic. Love interrupts, if you like, the consequences of your actions, which in my case is very good news indeed, because I've done a lot of stupid stuff. I'd be in big trouble if karma was going to finally be my judge. I'd be in deep s[tuff]. It doesn't excuse my mistakes, but I'm holding out for grace. I'm holding out that Jesus took my sins onto the Cross, because I know who I am, and I hope I don't have to depend on my own religiosity.

~ Bono, ***Bono: In Conversation with Michka Assayas.***

Tim Keller (sermon on March 13, 2005)

1. Jesus came to end all religion

Chapter 8, verses 1 and 2: "The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man." Readers of the Hebrew Scriptures would immediately be struck by two things that are different about this priesthood Jesus has than any other priesthood that ever happened.

First of all, notice it says this priest sits at the right hand of the throne. The right hand of the throne was a position of authority. The person who sat at the right hand of the throne was usually a kind of co-regent. I think we've mentioned this before. In the Old Testament you never have a priest who is a ruler or a ruler who's a priest. You never have a priest who is a king or a king who is a priest except for that shadowy figure, Melchizedek, but Jesus is a Priest-King.

The second thing we're told is, though he's a priest, though he's serving and he's ministering, he's seated. No priest ever ministers by being seated. What is he doing seated? It means a lot. If we want to understand the magnitude of what is being said, we need to think for a moment about the subject I've already mentioned which is the subject of religion. What is religion? If you look out at the world and see all the religions, I would propose to you all the religions have two things in common. You might say they have two components.

The first component they have is *all religions believe behind the realities of nature there is an ultimate reality.* There's a reality, capital R. There is some transcendent power above and

behind all of nature that can't be reduced to empirical, natural scientific factors or causes. So there's an ultimate reality.

The second thing all religions agree on is *there's some gap between us and that ultimate reality*. There's some gap that needs to be bridged, or there are some barriers that need to be overcome. We're not connected as we should be, and we need something to mediate to create that connection, to bridge that gap.

That's what all religions believe together. After that, the diversity is enormous as to how that gap is bridged. The religions differ enormously as to how that mediation is done. So you have religions who say it's done through sacrifices and offerings and oblations and ablutions. There are others who put all the emphasis on moral code and living a good life and leading good works.

Then you have a lot of emphasis on rituals or incantations or rites or prayer or meditation, transformation of consciousness. There'll be some religions that say, "Oh, the ultimate reality, the divine, is within you. You just have to learn how to tap into it," but they're still saying, "You're unenlightened. There's a gap. You have to overcome it. We're going to transform your consciousness." Everybody says there's an ultimate reality and there's some kind of gap that has to be bridged in order to get to that reality.

You say, "Well, yes, of course. Ancients were all religious, but we modern people are different. We modern people do not need the God-explanation. Many modern people believe everything that exists and everything that happens has a natural, scientific explanation. Everything that happens is just really some empirical, natural, scientific factor. Therefore, religion ... We don't need God the way the ancients needed God. We don't need the ultimate reality to explain things."

Of course, if you talk like that, you probably know for many years, especially in the twentieth century, many Western intellectuals and scholars believed humankind would eventually lose the need for religion, just like a lot of people say they don't need religion themselves. The human race would basically less and less need God and need religion. Therefore, it would start to weaken, or it would start to fade.

That has not happened, not at all. You certainly know if you're up at all on things religion not only is strengthening and growing every place in the world in general, and Christianity in particular, but do you know it's even starting to make a comeback in the academic world? Stanley Fish, who is one of the leading academics in the United States, is a person who's always writing for the big newspapers. He's one of our great public intellectuals. He's an atheist or an agnostic. He's a skeptic in that way. He's no friend of religion.

Yet just in January in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* he wrote an astonishing article, in which he said religion is poised to make a comeback in the academic world where it has been considered irrelevant for years. For decades the academic world was a stronghold of people who say, "We can explain everything in terms of just scientific, natural, empirical causes. We don't need God to explain the world." Yet here's what Stanley Fish says.

He says the university is about to be influenced by a new generation of academics who will be seeking guidance and inspiration. He says, "... many of them will believe that religion ... will provide them. Are we ready? We had better be, because that is now where the action is. When Jacques Derrida died I was called by a reporter who wanted know what would succeed high

theory and the triumvirate of race, gender, and class as the center of intellectual energy in the academy. I answered like a shot: religion.”

It’s astounding that Stanley Fish would say that, but of course, he’s just reading the tea leaves of history. That is religion is not weakening, and it’s not even weakening in the academic world where more and more people are realizing if you try to explain everything away, if you try to explain everything is just really scientific, natural, empirical factors, you explain away explanation. It’s a dead end.

C.S. Lewis as usual put it in a very literate way when he said in *The Abolition of Man*, “But you cannot go on ‘explaining away’ for ever: you will find that you have explained explanation itself away. You cannot go on ‘seeing through’ things for ever. The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it.

It is good that the window should be transparent, because the street or garden beyond it is opaque. [...] If you see through everything, then everything is transparent. But a wholly transparent world is an invisible world. To ‘see through’ all things is the same as not to see.” You say, “What was that?”

Here’s what it is. Let me give you in a nutshell a couple of examples. When Nietzsche says, “All claims of transcendent truth and God are really just power plays,” that would mean that claim would be just really a power play, so we don’t have to listen to it. He explained away his own explanation. When Freud says, “All claims of absolute truth and God are really just psychological projections dealing with your guilt and insecurity,” then that claim would be that, and we don’t have to listen to it. He has explained away his own explanation.

When evolutionary biologists say, “Oh, yes, your brain tells you there’s a God and there’s absolute truth, but that’s really just a hardwired brain chemical response designed to pass on your genetic code.” If that’s true, then what their brain tells them about evolution and natural selection is also the same. Therefore, why listen to it?

To see through everything is not to see. To explain away everything explains away explanation, including the explanation. What this means is the vast majority of the human race will always know there is an ultimate reality, unavoidably, that we can’t see through. There’s an ultimate reality that’s there. Everyone will feel the gap and will look to religion to deal with it. This is inevitable.

Religion is not weakening. It’s just strengthening. That’s a problem. You know that, because religion does bring conflict. It brings enormous conflict. “Well,” you say, “maybe the solution is to have a society in which we just stamp out religion.” Of course, we know we’ve been trying that in the twentieth century. There have been a couple of societies who have tried to stamp out religion.

When you try to stamp out religion, it only makes a society more brutal and more oppressive than it was when religion was dominant. We have a problem. Religion is not weakening. It’s only strengthening. Religion can’t be wiped out. Religion is only growing. What are we going to do about the problems of it?

Christianity, in the most unique possible way, says, “Embrace Jesus because Jesus came, not to start a new religion, not to start a better religion, but to end religion.” Now you’re in a position to understand what this is saying. He’s a priest and a king. That never is combined, and here’s the reason it’s never combined in the Old Testament.

The king represents God to the people, brings God's law, and says, "You must obey it," but the priest represents the people to God. The priest mediates and sacrifices and atones for the failures of the people to obey the law of God. The king represents God to the people, and the priest represents the people to God.

Jesus is the Priest-King. This is what the Bible says. First, *Jesus is the ultimate reality on the other side of the gap*. The whole book of Hebrews is about this. Do you remember in the very first chapter? It says, "Jesus, who made the universe, is the radiance of God's glory and the very exact image of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word." Jesus is the glory of God.

That's what filled the temple. In John 2, when Jesus says about his body, "Tear down this body, and in three days I will raise it up again," he is saying, "The glory of God fills my body as the *shekinah* glory of God filled the temple. I am the ultimate reality on the other side of the gap."

No one has ever said this before, because every other religion has a founder, of course, but the founder of every other religion has always said, "I am the teacher pointing to the ultimate reality." Maybe they even said, "I am the ultimate teacher pointing to the ultimate reality." Jesus says, "I am the ultimate reality to which all the teachers and prophets and preachers and sages point." Nobody has ever said that. "I am the ultimate reality on the other side of the gap."

Secondly, he's the priest, and that means *he's also the bridge over the gap*. His life and his death and his resurrection are the bridge over the gap between us and the divine. That's why you have Paul saying something like this in Colossians 1. He says, "Once you were alienated from God..." There's the gap. "But now he has reconciled you by Christ's body through death to present you perfect in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation."

Every other religion says, "Do this, give this, offer this, live this, experience this, and that will send you over the gap to God," but Jesus says, "I'm the God who at infinite cost to myself has come over the gap, has come over the barriers to you, barriers and a gap that you, with your puny little religious observances would never have been able to bridge, but I've come to you."

That's the reason why it says he's seated. Do you know why he's seated? All religious work is done. Jesus Christ is saying, "I conclude the work of religion." Bringing God over to us and us to God, "It's over. I have concluded it. I have finished it. Religion is finished. You don't need it anymore." He's the final temple to end all temples. He's the final Priest to end all priests. He's the final King to end all kings. He's also, of course, the final sacrifice to end all sacrifices.

In the Bible there is a word for religion. Do you know that? It's a Greek word that means religious observances and ceremonies and religious practice. You never ever see it applied to Christianity. There's a place where Festus, the Roman magistrate, calls Christianity a religion, and there's a place where Paul calls his Phariseism before he became a Christian a religion. Nowhere do you see the word *religion* applied to Christianity because historians know this.

The Romans, who loved religions, let everybody have their own religion. Every street corner had a different religion. They let a thousand religions bloom, yet they persecuted Christians and called them atheists. Do you know why? Because the Romans knew what you and I don't seem to know.

Even the average person in church doesn't know. The average person certainly in the society doesn't know Christianity was not the beginning of a new religion. It was the anti-religion. It was the end of all religions. That's why the Romans considered it the most radical thing anyone had ever said. That's why they were called atheists.

Dick Lucas, the English preacher from whom I've gotten a lot of ideas for my series on Hebrews, says if you really want to understand what the book of Hebrews is about, you have to imagine a conversation between a Roman and his Christian neighbor in the first century. The Roman says, "Oh, you have a new religion. That's very interesting. Where is your temple?" and the Christian says, "No temple. Jesus is our temple."

"Where do your priests operate, for crying out loud?"

"We don't need priests. Jesus is our Priest. No priests."

"Well, where do you do your sacrifices? Where do you do your offerings? Where do you do things so God will accept you?"

"Jesus is our sacrifice, and we're already accepted."

"What kind of religion is this?"

"It's not a religion."

Jesus came, not to give you a religion, but to give you a relationship, a new covenant relationship with God. Christianity does not bring you a religion. It brings you a person. In fact, Christianity, the gospel, is not just the end of religion. It's the opposite of religion because religion says, "Live like this, and God will accept you." The gospel is, "At infinite cost through Jesus Christ, God has accepted you. Now live like this." They're utterly different. It's totally not just the end of religion, the absolute contradiction and opposite of religion.

2. *Jesus came to give us a radical new covenant relationship with God.*

A. *What is a covenant?* Do you see this word all the way through here? "... I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel ... It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers ..." What's a covenant? First of all, we don't have a good English word for it. I think the average person hears the word *covenant*, and somebody says, "What's a covenant? Define covenant," and you probably say something like, "It's a contract."

The fact of the matter is that's a very inadequate synonym. Don't say that! There isn't a synonym. Here's why. In the Bible the most intimate relationships were the most binding relationships. A covenant is a relationship that is totally binding and yet totally intimate at once. In our culture we pit the personal against the legal and the formal. That's not how the Bible sees it.

In fact, the Bible says the more intimate, the more delightful, the more personal a relationship, the more binding, the more solemn, and the more legal it should be. Do you know why? Because the biblical understanding of *covenant* reflects the paradox of human relationships. What is that paradox? I'm glad you asked me that question.

It could be a friendship. It could be a love relationship, a marriage. If two people start a relationship and they both start off like this and they say to each other, "I will be what I should be to you in this relationship if and to the degree you are what you should be," if that's how your relationship starts, you will find that relationship very quickly becoming cold, becoming distant, becoming at best a kind of shaky business relationship.

There will be no intimacy. Oh my goodness, no intimacy at all. Do you know why? Because neither person wants to give up their independence. There's no intimacy without giving up autonomy. There's no intimacy without binding yourself and limiting yourself.

If two people instead start a relationship like this and they say to each other, "I will be what I should be in this relationship whether you are what you should be or not. I will be what I should be even if you're failing to be what you should be. I'm going to put your needs ahead of

my needs. I'm going to limit myself. I'm going to bind myself. I'm going to be caring and kind to you, whether I feel like it or not," the great paradox is in a relationship where people are committed despite their feelings, that is the place where intimate feelings can grow.

Do you know why? It's safe. The more committed a relationship is, the more intimate it will get, because the more I see somebody saying to me, "I'm going to be what I should be to you even if you're not," I can be weak. I can share. I can open up. Only and to the degree you're willing to give up your independence can you know the freedom of an intimate relationship. That's the paradox.

Only to the degree you're committed to somebody to be kind in spite of how you feel will you find intimate feelings being capable of being expressed, will vulnerability be possible. The more binding, the more intimate. That's a covenantal relationship.

B. *What is the new covenant?* God talks about an old covenant he had, a relationship. That's what a covenant is. It's a binding, intimate relationship, but his old covenant with the house of Israel was very religious. His old covenant with the house of Israel had a lot of the marks of religion, not all. This is a complicated issue, the relationship between the old covenant and the new covenant, but let me just make one point here.

In verse 9 you see God says, "... they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them ..." That's religion. Do you know what religion is? In religion you set up a conditional, selfish business relationship with a deity. Do you know what religion is? In religion you come to church or you start to pray, you start to read your Bible, and here's what you're saying.

"I will be the religious and good and moral person I should be as long as you are blessing me and helping me make money and giving me good health and helping me find somebody to get married to." In other words, "I'll do what I should do to the degree you're doing what you should do." That's religion. It's quid pro quo. It's tit for tat.

Of course, the idea is in religion the deity is looking down at the same time and saying, "Yes, these people over here are honoring me and they're worshiping me, so I'll be good to them. These people over here are not honoring me. They're not worshiping me, so I'm not going to be good to them." That's religion, and here it is. "If they do not remain faithful to my covenant, I turn my face away from them. If I see their sin, I turn my face away from them."

The new covenant isn't religion. In the new covenant we have verse 12. In verse 9, it says, "They sinned, so I turned my face away from them," but in verse 12, it says, "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." This is the opposite. Do you see? In the old covenant, God sees our sin and turns his face away from us, but in the new covenant God sees us and turns his face away from our sin. He even turns his memory away from our sin.

The old covenant is basically religious. It's a conditional business relationship, and there's no intimacy in it. The new covenant is unconditional. Therefore, there's a place for intimacy to grow. How could it be unconditional? How can God say, "Even if you sin, I will never turn my face away from you. I will only turn my face away from your sins"? How could that happen?

Here's how it can happen. You know how a relationship gets started that's a covenantal relationship? It's when somebody looks and says, "I will be what I should be to you. I'll be faithful to you even if you're not faithful to me." Where did God do that? Where did God say that? Where did God get the covenant relationship rolling?

I was talking not too long ago to a woman who said, "What I hate about this is it seems like everybody says, 'You need to submit to God's will.' I have to adjust to God. Why do I always have to adjust to God? Why can't he ever adjust to *me*?" Anyone who ever said ... I believe anytime she ever said that to any Christian type, they said, "How terrible! What do you mean? God never adjusts to us. We adjust to him."

That's not true. God did adjust to us cosmically, infinitely, on the cross. He adjusted to our sinfulness. He said, "I'm going to be faithful to you even if you're not faithful to me." Do you know what that cost him? On the cross the Father turned his face away from his Son. On the cross Jesus Christ was forsaken. That's the covenant curse of verse 9. Jesus did keep the covenant. He was perfectly obedient, but God turned his face. Why? He got the covenant curse so we could get the covenant blessing unconditionally and eternally.

When you realize what he did for you, when you realize he took his own covenant curse, as it were, so he could say, "Even when you sin, I will remember your sins no more," we said the more binding a covenant is, the more binding a relationship is, the more intimate it can be. Jesus Christ bound himself. He nailed himself to you. If he bound himself like that, how intimate could this relationship be? What's interesting is the quid pro quo is over now.

If you're a religious person, you sit around and you say, "I'm coming to church. I'm being very, very good, and I'm trying really hard to live a good life. My life isn't going all that well, and my neighbor who is not trying at all to live a good life ... His life is going a whole lot better than mine." That's a religion. Have you ever thought like that? That's because your heart is still shot through. It's still the default mode of the human heart. Do you know why? You're saying, "I'm doing this and this and this. What has God done for me lately?" Have you thought of the cross?

A person who has been changed by the gospel, who has been brought into a grace relationship, who has been brought into a new covenant relationship with God, will never ask that question again. "God unconditionally loved me. Now I unconditionally love him. As a result, the possibilities of intimacy in this relationship are astounding."

C. *How do you know if you're in this new covenant relationship?* How do you know if you've been broken out of religion, the default mode of the human heart? There are three marks. I'm just going to look at those three marks, and then we'll finish. There are actually more in this passage than I'm going to cover, but we have to just stop somewhere. We'll get to some next week too.

There are three ways you can know you're in the new covenant relationship. Number one, *intimacy rather than formalism*. "... they will all know me ..." Number two, *equality versus classism*. "... from the least of them to the greatest." And number three, *community versus individualism*. "... they will be my people." Let's just be brief here.

First of all, *intimacy rather than formalism*. In religion there's no intimacy with God. Basically, it's a week-by-week thing, a renewable contract. "I'm doing my best. Are you doing your best?" and all that sort of thing. You may get inspired sometimes. You may get convicted sometimes, but let me ask you. Do you know him? Do you see what it says there? "They will all know me." Not know *about* me, know me.

Have you ever experienced his love on your heart as an overwhelming encounter? Have you ever read the Scripture and found instead of just abstract concepts some of the things the Bible says begin to just become alive and radioactive? They become living, bright realities and they console and they comfort and they change the way in which you react to the world and life.

Have you ever had a sense God is taking you by the scruff of the neck and sticking you up to the mirror saying, "Will you please look at yourself?" Have you ever had a sense you actually are in a relationship? There's personal interaction. There's personal encounter. There's personal dealing, or is God just someone you believe in, you say your prayers to occasionally? That's religion. Intimacy is the mark of being in the new covenant, because you know his unconditional regard for you.

Secondly, *equality versus classism*. This is important. Do you notice what it says? It says, "... they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest." When you would go into the tabernacle or the temple, barriers were everywhere. Have you ever studied ...? This is the way all temples are.

For example, if you went into the temple in the Old Testament, there was an inner court for Jews, an outer court for Gentiles. There was an inner court for men, then there was the court of the women. If you were a woman, you couldn't come in. If you were a man, you could. If you had a disease, you couldn't even come into the building.

When we get to Matthew 1, the genealogy of Jesus, we see women as well as men. We see foreigners as well as Jews. We see prostitutes as well as moral paragons. Do you know what we have here? If you understand the radical difference between religion that says, "If you live this way, God will accept you," and the gospel that says, "Because God has accepted you through Jesus Christ, you live this way," if you don't understand the difference there, if you don't see how radically different it is, you're in trouble, because religion leads to conflict.

Here's why. Religion is based on the idea *you* are bridging the gap, that you're doing it. If you base your identity on being a hardworking person, you have to despise people you perceive as lazy. If you base your identity on being an open-minded person, you have to despise and feel superior to people you perceive as bigoted.

If your identity is based on being a moral, religious person, you have to look down your nose, you have to feel superior to people who don't have your beliefs and don't have your practices. That's why religion leads to conflict, because all religion automatically makes you feel superior, which often leads to exclusion, which sometimes leads to oppression. It creates a slippery slope.

Do you see? If you believe you're saved by grace, from the least to the greatest there's no difference. We're all equally lost whether we're kind of religious and kind of moral or a prostitute or an addict or a hit man for a mob. It doesn't matter. We're all equally lost. We're all equally affirmed and loved. It's completely egalitarian. It destroys the thing in religion leads to conflict. It expunges it from your soul. Do you understand that? Have you felt it? From the least to the greatest.

Thirdly, *community versus individualism*. Notice it says, "I will put my law in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my persons." No, it didn't say that. "They will be my persons"? This is an important distinction. He doesn't say, "You will be one of the many individuals whom I have a personal relationship with." He says, "When you experience my salvation, it makes you part of a new community, the new humanity, the new people he's creating."

Do you remember how we've said over and over Jesus is not just a priest but a king? He's not just a priest; he's the Creator King. Do you know what that means? Jesus did not come just to create a religion; he came to create a new world. In the beginning when God created a

world, he created the world and then propagated the people to fill it. Now as he's recreating through redemption, he starts by creating the people and then later on he will design a world for us to live in.

Do you know what "the people of God" is? It's the new humanity. It's the pilot program for the great future he is going to be producing in which all injustice is gone, all poverty is gone, all disease is gone, all evil is gone. To be saved is to be part of a new humanity, a place where radical grace has changed us and we get a foretaste of what life in the new heavens and new earth is going to be like.

When you realize God came and said to you, "I am going to be faithful to you even if you aren't being everything you should be to me," that means we can't treat church that way. We can't walk into church and look around and say, "I will come to this church as long as it's meeting my needs. I'll be friends to you, brothers and sisters, as long as you're meeting my needs, but if you're not meeting my needs, I have to go someplace else."

That's religion. Religion says, "I will be to you what I should be to the degree you're being what you should be to me." The new covenant creates covenantal people who look at brothers and sisters, who look at the church, and say, "This church is relatively flawed. All these brothers and sisters around me are relatively flawed, but I'm going to be true to them. I'm going to be committed to them, even if they're not always being what they ought to be." Doesn't that make sense to do that?

Lastly, do you realize if God is this personal, not remote and distant, not some life force, it's both a wonderful invitation and a frightening responsibility? C.S. Lewis put it something like this: "An impersonal god, well and good. A subjective god of beauty, truth, and goodness inside my head, better still. A formless life force surging through us all of vast, divine power which we can all tap into, that's wonderful, but a living God, a personal God, approaching at infinite speed, the hunter, the king, the lover, that is quite another matter.

There comes a moment when people who have been dabbling in religion suddenly draw back, realizing, 'What if we actually find him? Worse yet, what if he finds us?' If there is a God, you are, in a sense, alone with him. You cannot put him off with speculations about your neighbor's hypocrisy or memories of what you have read in books. What will all that chatter and hearsay count for when the anesthetic fog we call the real world fades away and the divine presence in which you have always stood becomes palpable, immediate, and unavoidable?"

If God is personal, you have to relate to him, but if God is this personal, why wouldn't you want to relate to him? Let us pray.¹

Tim Keller – Religion vrs Gospel (from *The Gospel Life*):

¹ Timothy J. Keller, [The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive](#) (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013).

| Religion | Gospel |
|---|---|
| "I obey; therefore, I'm accepted." | "I'm accepted; therefore, I obey." |
| Motivation is based on fear and insecurity. | Motivation is based on grateful joy. |
| I obey God in order to get things from God. | I obey God to get God-to delight in and resemble him. |
| When circumstances in my life go wrong, I am angry at God or myself, since I believe that anyone who is good deserves a comfortable life. | When circumstances in my life go wrong, I struggle, but I know all my punishment fell on Jesus and that while God may allow this for my training, he will exercise his Fatherly love within my trial. |
| When I am criticized, I am furious or devastated, because it is critical that I think of myself as a "good person." Threats to that self-image must be destroyed at all costs. | When I am criticized, I struggle, but it is not essential for me to think of myself as a "good person." My identity is not built on my record or my performance but on God's love for me in Christ. |
| My prayer life consists largely of petition, and it only heats up when I am in a time of need. My main purpose in prayer is control of the environment. | My prayer life consists of generous stretches of praise and adoration. My main purpose is fellowship with God. |
| My self-view swings between two poles. If and when I am living up to my standards, I feel confident, but then I am prone to be proud and unsympathetic to failing people. If and when I am not living up to standards, I feel humble but not confident-I feel like a failure. | My self-view is not based on my moral achievement. In Christ I am <i>simul iustus et peccator</i> —simultaneously sinful and lost, yet accepted in Christ. I am so bad that he had to die for me, and I am so loved that he was glad to die for me. This leads me to deep humility and confidence at the same time. |
| My identity and self-worth are based mainly on how hard I work, or how moral I am-and so I must look down on those I perceive as lazy or immoral. | My identity and self-worth are centered on the one who died for me. I am saved by sheer grace, so I can't look down on those who believe or practice something different from me. Only by grace am I what I am. |



PARKING ENFORCEMENT
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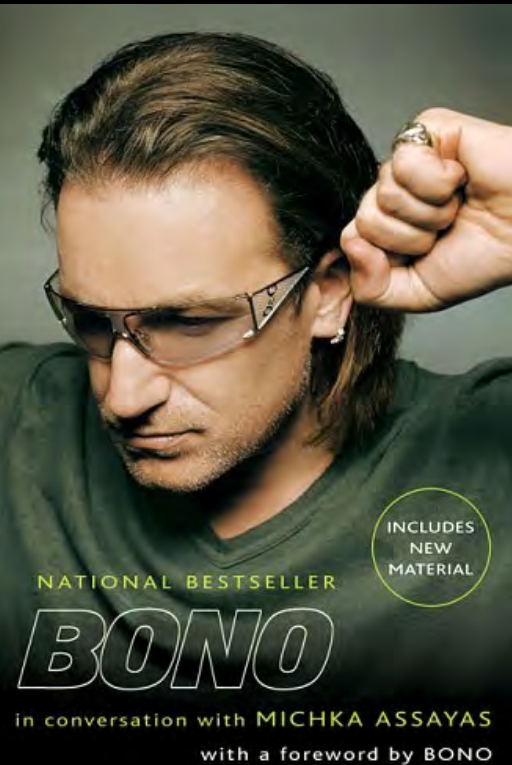









You see, at the center of all religions is the idea of Karma. You know, what you put out comes back to you: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, or in physics; in physical laws every action is met by an equal or an opposite one. It's clear to me that Karma is at the very heart of the universe.



~ Bono, *Bono: In Conversation with Michka Assayas.*

A black and white photograph of a mountain range viewed through a cave opening. The text "JESUS IS GREATER" is overlaid in the center in a large, white, serif font. Below it, in a smaller, white, serif font, is the text "BOOK OF HEBREWS". The scene is framed by the dark, jagged rock of the cave entrance, leading to a vast, rugged mountain landscape under a cloudy sky. The foreground is filled with rocks and debris, suggesting a path or a natural opening in the mountain.

JESUS IS GREATER

BOOK OF HEBREWS

JESUS

GREATER THAN



Jesus > OT Prophets

Jesus > Angels

Jesus' Gospel > Old Testament Law

Jesus = 100% Human & Jesus = 100% God

Jesus > the situations OT prophets wrote about

Jesus > Moses

Jesus' Salvation > Moses' Exodus

Jesus' Rest > Moses' Promised Land

Jesus > all previous priests

Hebrews 8:1-13

¹Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, ²and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.

Hebrews 8:1-13

³Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. ⁴If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already priests who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. ⁵They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: “See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.”

Hebrews 8:1-13

⁶But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.

Hebrews 8:1-13

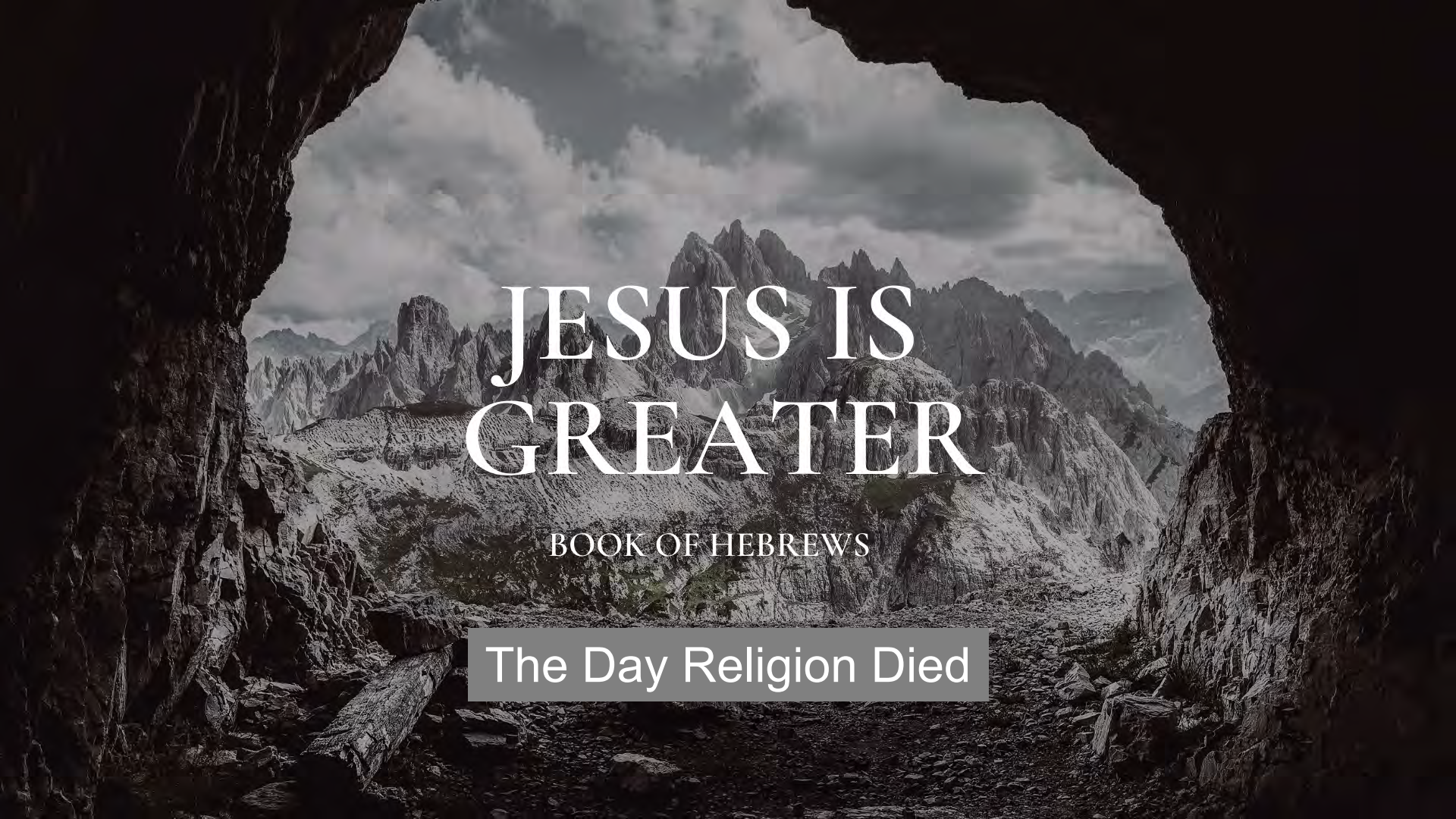
⁷For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. ⁸But God found fault with the people and said: “The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. ⁹It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord.

Hebrews 8:1-13

¹⁰This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ¹¹No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹²For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

Hebrews 8:1-13

¹³By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.



JESUS IS GREATER

BOOK OF HEBREWS

The Day Religion Died

There's a New Priest in Town

Hebrews 8:1-2

¹Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, ²and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.

And He's better than the old priest

Hebrews 8:3-5

³Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. ⁴If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already priests who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. ⁵They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain."

There's a New World Order in Town

Hebrews 8:6

⁶But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.

And it's better than the old order

Hebrews 8:7-12

⁷For if there had been nothing wrong with that first covenant, no place would have been sought for another. ⁸But God found fault with the people and said: “The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. ⁹It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they did not remain faithful to my covenant, and I turned away from them, declares the Lord.

And it's better than the old order

Hebrews 8:7-12

¹⁰This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ¹¹No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹²For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

And it's better than the old order
God's ways are on our very being

Hebrews 8:7-12

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And it's better than the old order

God is accessed

Hebrews 8:7-12

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And it's better than the old order
God is known and for all

Hebrews 8:7-12

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And it's better than the old order
Sins are forgiven and not remembered

Hebrews 8:7-12

¹⁰This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ¹¹No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. ¹²For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

In fact, the old one is now outmoded

Hebrews 8:13

¹³By calling this covenant “new,”
he has made the first one obsolete;
and what is obsolete and outdated
will soon disappear.

There's a New Priest in Town

Hebrews 8:1-2

¹Now the main point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, ²and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by a mere human being.

The first component they have is *all religions believe behind the realities of nature there is an ultimate reality*. There's a reality, capital R. There is some transcendent power above and behind all of nature that can't be reduced to empirical, natural scientific factors or causes. So there's an ultimate reality.

The second thing all religions agree on is *there's some gap between us and that ultimate reality*. There's some gap that needs to be bridged, or there are some barriers that need to be overcome. We're not connected as we should be, and we need something to mediate to create that connection, to bridge that gap...

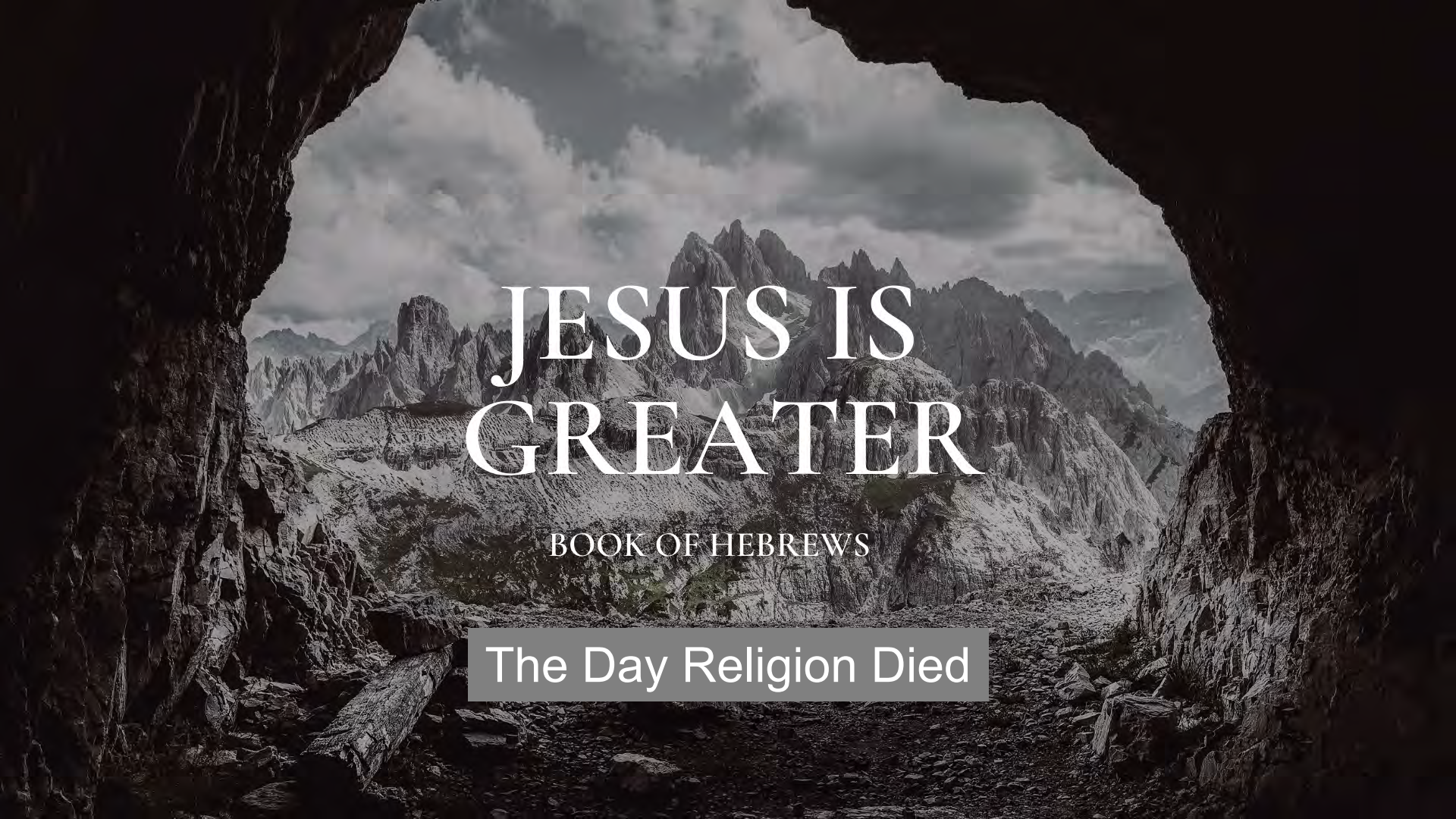
“ [Every] other religion has a founder, of course, but the founder of every other religion has always said, “I am the teacher pointing to the ultimate reality.” Maybe they even said, “I am the ultimate teacher pointing to the ultimate reality.” Jesus says, “I am the ultimate reality to which all the teachers and prophets and preachers and sages point.” Nobody has ever said that. “I am the ultimate reality on the other side of the gap.”

Secondly, he's the priest, and that means *he's also the bridge over the gap*. His life and his death and his resurrection are the bridge over the gap between us and the divine. That's why you have Paul saying something like this in Colossians 1. He says, "Once you were alienated from God...." There's the gap. "But now he has reconciled you by Christ's body through death to present you perfect in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation."

“Every other religion says, “Do this, give this, offer this, live this, experience this, and that will send you over the gap to God,” but Jesus says, “I’m the God who at infinite cost to myself has come over the gap, has come over the barriers to you, barriers and a gap that you, with your puny little religious observances would never have been able to bridge, but I’ve come to you.”

“That’s the reason why it says he’s seated. Do you know why he’s seated? All religious work is done. Jesus Christ is saying, “I conclude the work of religion.” Bringing God over to us and us to God, “It’s over. I have concluded it. I have finished it. Religion is finished. You don’t need it anymore.” He’s the final temple to end all temples. He’s the final Priest to end all priests. He’s the final King to end all kings. He’s also, of course, the final sacrifice to end all sacrifices.

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JESUS IS GREATER

BOOK OF HEBREWS

The Day Religion Died

STUDY GUIDE



gospelin**life**
Grace Changes Everything
EIGHT SESSIONS

TIMOTHY KELLER



Religion vrs The Gospel

RELIGION:

I obey - therefore I'm
accepted.

Religion vrs The Gospel

RELIGION:

I obey God in order to get things from God.

Religion vrs The Gospel

RELIGION:

When I am criticized I am furious or devastated because it is critical that I think of myself as a 'good person'. Threats to that self-image must be destroyed at all costs.

Religion vrs The Gospel

RELIGION:

My self-view swings between two poles. If and when I am living up to my standards, I feel confident, but then I am prone to be proud and unsympathetic to failing people. If and when I am not living up to standards, I feel insecure and inadequate. I'm not confident. I feel like a failure.

Religion vrs The Gospel

RELIGION:

I obey – therefore I'm
accepted.

THE GOSPEL:

I'm accepted - therefore I
obey.

Religion vrs The Gospel

RELIGION:

I obey God in order to get things from God.

THE GOSPEL:

I obey God to get to God-to delight and resemble Him.

Religion vrs The Gospel

RELIGION:

When I am criticized I am furious or devastated because it is critical that I think of myself as a 'good person'. Threats to that self-image must be destroyed at all costs.

THE GOSPEL:

When I am criticized I struggle, but it is not critical for me to think of myself as a 'good person.' My identity is not built on my record or my performance but on God's love for me in Christ. I can take criticism.

Religion vrs The Gospel

RELIGION:

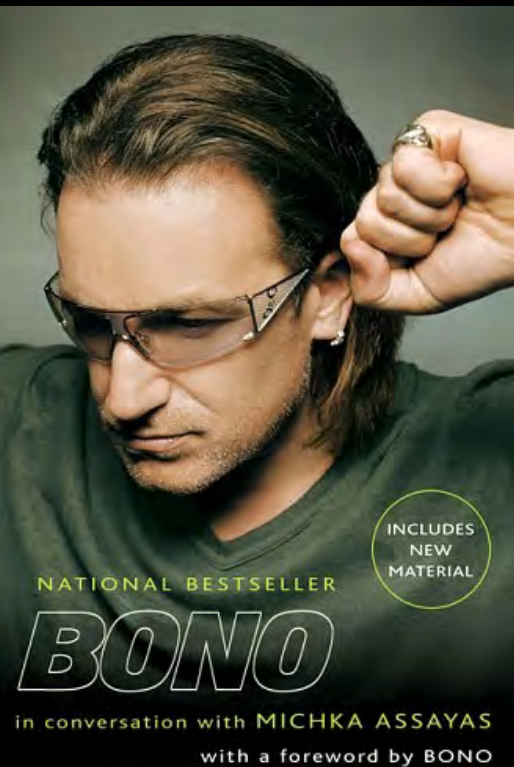
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THE GOSPEL:

My self-view is not based on a view of my self as a moral achiever. In Christ I am "*simul iustus et peccator*" – simultaneously sinful and yet accepted in Christ. I am so bad he had to die for me and I am so loved he was glad to die for me. This leads me to deeper and deeper humility and confidence at the same time. Neither swaggering nor sniveling.

“And yet, along comes this idea called Grace to upend all that “as you reap, so you will sow” stuff. Grace defies reason and logic. Love interrupts, if you like, the consequences of your actions, which in my case is very good news indeed, because I’ve done a lot of stupid stuff.”





I'd be in big trouble if karma was going to finally be my judge. I'd be in deep s[tuff]. It doesn't excuse my mistakes, but I'm holding out for grace. I'm holding out that Jesus took my sins onto the Cross, because I know who I am, and I hope I don't have to depend on my own religiosity.

~ Bono, *Bono: In Conversation with Michka Assayas*.

Gospel Applications:

Is Religion Dead in your life?

- *Why do you obey God?*
- *How do you handle criticism*
- *Where does your self-view come from?*