

Forest Baptist

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Free

No
religion
here
thanks





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Forest Baptist
is published by

*Forest Baptist Church
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Come along and visit us and you'll find that our services are very straightforward: we sing, pray, read the Bible and someone will preach. The preaching is an important part of our services because we believe it matters that people should understand the Bible's message as clearly as possible. So the preacher will spend time explaining a part of the Bible and will aim to show that the teaching of the Bible is as relevant to us as it was for the people who first read it. You'd be welcome to join us on Sunday!

Further information about the church may be found on the back cover.

Please note that we ask that no part of "Forest Baptist" be reproduced or transmitted without the prior permission of the church.



In this edition...

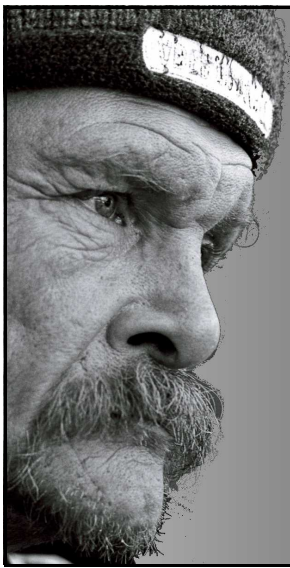
Sometimes Christians will knock on doors and try to speak about God to the householder. They get many different reactions but one of the most common is this: "No thanks, I'm not religious". But is that true? This edition of our mini-magazine addresses that issue in an article based upon a talk given at our church last summer. The talk was the third in a series entitled "The things people say". All the talks are available for listening to, or reading, on our website.

“GOD isn't what YOU think!”

**A series of talks on Sunday afternoons,
at 5.00pm, during the summer.**

All are welcome!

**Further details available on our website or
by getting in touch. Contact information
is on the back page.**



I'm not religious!

Today in the UK many people live their lives without reference to God. And when a Christian approaches such a person and invites them to talk about God, the response they will often hear is this: “No thanks, I'm not religious”. But is that true? Is this person truly not religious, or is it that they simply have their own religion which they don't want to question? In this talk I want to analyse this statement which people make and see where the truth actually lies.

What does it mean to “be religious”?

Let's start with this word “religious”. What are the main features of “begin religious”? Let me suggest four things:

Firstly, I think it means *a person who has a set of beliefs which explain where the world comes from and how the world operates*. For one religious person that may mean belief in a god. For another it may mean believing in a world which constantly recycles itself. But whatever the idea, a religious person is someone who has some explanation for the world.

Secondly, *a religious person is normally someone who draws these ideas from an authority figure*

or figures, whether alive or dead. There will be a prophet or a guru, and maybe a book, who is the source of their ideas.

Thirdly, *a religious person normally has a set of moral guidelines* which tell them how to behave. Those rules may differ greatly between people but there will be this set of rules for conduct in society.

Fourthly *a religious person has their life shaped not only by beliefs but by a pattern of life which marks them out*. They will have special activities such as worship or pilgrimages. They will also have day-to-day practices such as wearing particular clothes and jewellery, or eating particular foods.

So when we talk about “being religious” then I think it is things like these four I've mentioned, which are in mind. Four characteristics which can be found in a person which marks this person out as a religious person.

How many people are like this?

But now let's move on to ask this: how many of us are like this? On the basis of these characteristics, how many of us are “religious”?

We all have beliefs about the world

Firstly, I said that a religious person is somebody who holds a set of beliefs which explain where the world comes from and how the world operates. Now how many people are like this? Well the fact is that wherever you go, you discover that virtually **all** people like to have a set of beliefs in this area: telling stories about the source of the world and how the world works.

“People want to have some explanation of the world and how it works”

So you can go deep into a jungle and find a little tribe of people, untouched by the outside world, and you will find that they have a story about the world. And you can go and visit a university professor and he will also tell you about how the world began, and how it works. These two views will be utterly different from one another. But the point is this: both people want to have some explanation.

Admittedly, not everyone needs it to be worked out in fine detail. But even those who claim to be less bothered, like to have something to believe. You can meet an ordinary person who may not have the faintest idea what the professor in his study thinks. But she'll tell you that we all came from a “big bang”.

So all of us like to have beliefs in this area. In this sense we are all religious.

We all have our experts

Secondly, I said that a religious person generally learns his or her beliefs from some authority figure. But, again, how many people are like this? Well isn't it the case that in **every** society you find that people like to have their experts. In my imaginary tribe, there is a witchdoctor. In our society we have various experts - whether scientists or agony aunts -

explaining life to us.

Human beings like their experts to tell them what to believe. And our experts like playing this role: just see how aggressive or dismissive they can become, if anyone dares to suggest they might be wrong. They know they're right!

Some experts have more power than others; some experts are conmen. All I'm saying is this: human beings all over the world like having these authorities. We don't just go on intuition. We like to have others telling us what to think. In this sense we are all religious.

We all have our moral rules

Thirdly, I spoke about the moral rules that shape a religious person. But how many people have a set of rules like this? **All** of us. They are found in a jungle tribe and they are found in our society. Indeed in some ways we are obsessed with making rules about the behaviour of other people. “You can say this but you can't say that. You can do this but you can't do that.”

Human beings are just like this. We aren't simply creatures of random behaviour. Nor are we creatures of pure selfish concern. We insist on having these moral guidelines which we feel we must abide by.

“We insist on having these moral guidelines”

It is true amongst all types of people. As the saying goes: there is even honour amongst thieves. A gang of violent lads will have a set of rules amongst themselves. They may respect nobody else's rules, but amongst themselves, there are certain things you can do and certain things you can't do. This is the way that human beings are made. In this sense we are all religious.

We all have “people like us”

Fourthly, I spoke about how a religious person is shaped by a pattern of life which marks them

out: special activities; special clothes; special symbols and so on.

But aren't **most** people like this? Look at football fans. Look at teenagers. People like having a common lifestyle. Sure, we don't all like each other's lifestyles. Often we are quite contemptuous of others. But you see my main point: human beings are just made this way. We like to have something in common with others which marks us out; which makes us feel that we belong. In this sense we are all religious.

Why are we like this?

So, thus far, I've described four characteristics of "being religious" and I've tried to show you that these are, in fact, just characteristics of being human. A religion is just something which tries to meet all these needs in a tidy scheme. But the needs themselves are just built into us and all of us satisfy these needs in one way or another. We may attach ourselves to a formal religion or we may make up our own. But all of us have these characteristics.

"All of us satisfy these needs one way or another"

So let me now ask you a question: why are we like this? Why aren't we creatures who just graze on our food, make our little homes, reproduce and then die? Why do we have these other characteristics? Why are we like this? Well what I'd like to do is give to you the Bible's answer to that question.

We were made to know God

Firstly, we are people who look for an explanation of the world for this reason: it is because we were made to know the ultimate explanation for the world. We were made to know God, our creator. In the Bible book called Genesis, in chapter one, we have a description of God making the human race and he describes the process in these terms: "Let us

make man in our image" Mankind was designed to be like God and therefore to know God. As one preacher in the Bible says, "What God has done he has done so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him"

"God is personal. He's the speaking God."

However, the Bible also explains that we have rejected our creator. We don't like him and we don't want him. But even so, we can't get this basic instinct out of our system. We know that there is something or rather someone who can explain everything. But since we won't have God to satisfy this instinct we've come up with countless numbers of our own explanations. That's the source of the religions of the world and all the other schemes we're given to explain the way things are. People want this longing inside of them satisfied: what is this world about? But the Bible says that satisfaction only comes in truly knowing your creator.

We were made to learn from God

Secondly, we are people who like to have experts telling us what to believe. Why is this? Because God made us to be people who would learn from him. God is personal. He's the speaking God who has spoken through a book – the Bible. More than that he's spoken through a person – his Son, Jesus Christ. As one verse in the Bible says "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son"

We have a longing for our experts because God made us to learn from him, but in our rebellion we've replaced him with human experts. You see we can't get rid of the instinct inside. Still we need to have that expert voice telling us about life, but since we won't have God, we have any number of human alternatives to fill the gap.

We have a conscience

Thirdly, we are people who like to have our moral guidelines. Why? It's because, says the Bible, God made us to be like himself and he is a God who judges between things. He loves what is good and hates what is evil. As God says at one point in the Bible, "Seek good, not evil, that you may live ... Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts." God is moral and he has made us to be moral.

"We've become the source of our own moral guidelines and what a mess we've made!"

And we can't get rid of that instinct. Each of us has a conscience which tells us that there is right and wrong. We constantly judge other people and condemn those who are wrong. Now having rejected God we often do that according to our own made-up rules – whatever seems right in our own eyes and according to our opinions. We've become the source of our own moral guidelines and what a mess we've made as a result! But we insist on trying to do it because the instinct is there inside of us and we can't get rid of it.

We should be one family

Fourthly, I said that we are people who like to have a pattern to our lives which marks us out as belonging to some particular group. Why is that? Because we were designed as a single race, to be members of God's family. We were supposed to be his children. As one preacher says to a crowd, in the Bible: "We are God's offspring."

Now we have rejected being a part of God's family but the instinct he gave us remains. We want to come together with others and have markers which show that we belong. However, we've done that our own way and the result has been horrible. Our single human race has

broken up into smaller groups and then we've turned to hatred of other groups – whether because of nationality, skin colour, social status or whatever. The instinct to be part of one large group is still there within us but it has been distorted. We need to belong with others but now we are also willing to hate others too.

Stop looking elsewhere


So do you see? When we think about the characteristics of "being religious" we find that all of us have them – even if we find different ways of satisfying them. So the real question we must face is not "am I religious or not" but rather "why are we like this?" And I've shown you the answer that the Bible gives – an answer which I believe makes perfect sense of us.

But not only that, the Bible gives an answer which can then perfectly satisfy these desires. It invites us to come back to our Creator and to know him. To know him through his Son: Jesus Christ. It invites us to understand this world properly, to listen to a true expert, to have the right way to live and to become truly one family. The Lord Jesus Christ provides real answers, satisfying answers, to all these instincts which God has built into us.

"The Bible gives an answer which can satisfy these desires."

It's time to stop looking elsewhere. It's time to stop making excuses. You cannot find true satisfaction in life amongst all the man-made religions that we've come up with whilst we've been running away from God. You cannot find true satisfaction in life by simply ignoring the question – claiming to be "not religious" - and running away from God. It's time to go back to God and discover him as he truly is. How do you do that? Through Jesus Christ. He is the only way to know God. But when you do know God through him, then you will find all your deepest needs and desires are met.

While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the market-place day by day with those who happened to be there. A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began to dispute with him. Some of them asked, 'What is this babbler trying to say?' Others remarked, 'He seems to be advocating foreign gods.' They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection. Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, 'May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean.' (All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas.) Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: 'Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands.' (NIV)



Are you under 12 and looking for something good to do? Then why not come along to our Friday club? It runs every Friday afternoon from 4.15pm, for around an hour.. Just get in touch with us for more details.



Forest Baptist Church



Welsh Chapel
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Sunday Services:

10.30am and 5.00pm

Further information:

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(Calls cost whatever you normally pay for London numbers)