

Christianity: Beliefs and teachings

Key Words

- Monotheistic:** Believing in one God
- Omniscient:** All-Knowing
- Immanent:** Present with people
- Benevolence:** Loving
- Omnipotent:** All-powerful
- Holy Trinity:** The concept of three persons (Father, Son & Holy Spirit)
- Original Sin:** Sin that first entered the world through Adam and Eve's disobedience
- Myth:** A story that is used to convey important truths but it is not meant to be taken literally.
- Evil:** Everything that is the opposite of good; that which is wicked and causes suffering
- Moral evil:** Suffering caused by the actions of human beings
- Natural evil:** Suffering created through no direct fault of humans (earthquakes, floods etc.)
- Sacrificial love:** A love that places God and other people above yourself
- Agape:** The term in the New Testament to describe sacrificial love
- Beatitudes:** Blessings
- God incarnate:** The concept of God as man.
- Crucifixion:** Jesus' death on the cross.
- Resurrection:** Jesus's return from the dead
- Ascension:** Jesus' return to heaven after resurrection
- Atonement:** Something which is done to pay for doing something wrong.
- Salvation:** Being saved from eternity in hell through repentance and Jesus' death on the cross.
- Repentance:** Saying sorry to God for sin
- Heaven:** Eternal life after death in the presence of God.
- Purgatory:** A place for the purification of the elect.

Nature of God

Christianity is a monotheistic religion and all Christians believe God is eternal, omniscient, transcendent benevolent, personal and omnipotent. Christians also believe God is a fair and righteous judge, he sets the rules and provided a perfect example of Godly living in Jesus. Different groups of Christians emphasise some characteristics more than others (God as judge was favoured by the church in 14th and 15th century but now the Protestant church emphasises his forgiving and loving character.

The role and purpose of human beings

Humans are given the authority to rule over the earth and instructed to 'be fruitful'. Adam and Eve possess free will and were told by God to not eat from the tree of 'the knowledge of good and evil' (Genesis 2:17). The serpent suggests that God wants to prevent Adam and Eve from being as knowledgeable as God and tempts them to eat the fruit. Eve chooses to eat it and shares some with Adam. This is known as original sin and destroys the perfect relationship that had existed between God and humans (The Fall). God punishes Adam and Eve and sends them out of the Garden of Eden. Many Christians believe that the Fall has affected the entire human race. They believe that every person born is affected by original sin and that humans are in need of salvation to bring them back into the relationship. Unless this price of sin is paid, a person has no hope of eternal life in heaven with God.

Creation

All Christians believe that God caused the universe to exist.

Role of the father as creator

At the start of creation, God brings order to chaos by speaking aloud and bringing all things into existence. He created the earth in six days and this creation demonstrated God's power. God named parts of nature and this shows God's authority over creation. In the final part of creation, God made humans in the image of God.

Role of the spirit in Genesis 1 & 2

In Genesis 1 the Spirit is present and 'hovering over the water'. This means the spirit is caring and preparing to bring life into the world. When God created Adam, he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life which can be translated as the spirit. This shows God's unique relationship with humans.

The role of the word (Jesus)

The word is present with God before creation. The word becomes flesh when he is incarnated as Jesus

Trinity

Most Christians believe that the Bible presents God as a Holy Trinity. Each of the persons is God and there is only one God. All persons are equal but fulfil different roles. The Father and Holy Spirit are unseen but Jesus was God incarnate. Some Christians believe that the Trinity leads to the idea that there is more than one God and puts monotheism in danger. Unitarians such as the Christadelphians do not believe in the Trinity

Different and divergent interpretations of the Genesis story

All Christians agree that God created the universe, he acted out of love and humans are made in God's image. However, there are different understandings of the creation story:

Literal interpretations (Creationists)	Genesis as myth
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Bible is the actual word of God Genesis is an accurate historical account of creation Reject science Believe the world is approximately 5700 years old The Bible is the absolute truth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are differences between the account in Genesis 1 and 2 so they could be myths. Science suggests the world is billions of years old so the Bible can't be literally true. Genesis tells us important truths about humans, creation and our relationship with God. Some Christians agree with Theistic Evolution which is the idea that life developed through evolution but this process was started by God. Many Christians believe that each day of the week in creation represents a longer period of time.



The problem of evil

Christians believe that suffering caused by death is a direct result of original sin. Suffering in the world leads to the problem of evil which asks:

- If God is benevolent, why doesn't he care enough to stop suffering?—maybe he is not omnipotent?
- If he is omnipotent and has the power, maybe he does not care enough—perhaps he is not benevolent?

Some Christians are suffering as a result of moral evil (famine and disease etc.) This does not explain why God allows natural evils. Other Christians see evil and suffering as a test. Without natural disasters there would be no way for people to show their love for others in need. Others believe that God has a purpose which is beyond human understanding and that it is an opportunity to share in the suffering of Jesus.

Christianity: Beliefs & teachings

Christian beliefs about Jesus

Jesus is important to Christians because he is an example to them, was the Son of God and sacrificed himself so that humans restored their relationship with God.



Christians believe:

- Jesus was God incarnated
- He was a result of the immaculate conception
- The Holy Spirit caused Mary to become pregnant
- Jesus is the Messiah ('anointed one') meaning that they are referring to him as King.

Jesus as Lord and Saviour

Jesus is referred to as saviour as he was sent to earth to take the punishment for human sin (the fall). His death was enough payment for human sin as he was perfect and not affected by original sin. Jesus also came back to life (resurrection) as he had the power to do this. The death and resurrection brought forgiveness from God and restored his relationship with humans. Jesus made it possible for Christians to spend eternity in heaven after death.

All Christians believe Jesus was both God and man but some disagree about his virgin birth, his miracles and resurrection. Liberal Christians do not take the Bible stories literally and believe the miracles are just stories. Conservative Christians may say that God can do anything so accept literal accounts in the Bible.

Jesus' teachings and life

Christians use the example of Jesus to understand how to be obedient to God. Jesus accepted all people and this shows that a relationship with God is possible for anyone. Jesus showed this with his actions and teachings. Jesus acted with compassion, performed miracles and helped those in need

Salvation

Before Jesus, people atoned for sin by making a sacrifice on the Day of Atonement. The blood of the animal would bring atonement between humans and God on that day. However, humans continued to sin every year. Jesus' sacrifice was made when he offered his own life and blood on the cross. This had an eternal effect. Through this sacrifice, people receive salvation from God. Christians teach that as people show repentance, God accepts Jesus' death as payment. This means Christians are saved through the grace of God. If they have faith in Christ, humans have his blessing even if they are imperfect.

All Christians believe in salvation but express it in different ways. Some believe they will be saved through baptism. For others, being saved is a result of conversion as it is letting Jesus into their lives

Christian love

Jesus demonstrated love for others in his teachings and actions. His greatest commandment was to 'Love your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind'. The second was to 'Love your neighbor as yourself'. Jesus' teachings demonstrate sacrificial love (agape). Christians follow Jesus' example by showing forgiveness, helping others and trying to achieve peace. Evangelism allows Christians to share the message of Jesus through preaching.



Jesus' incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection

As God incarnate, Jesus was able to perform miracles & these miracles demonstrated that he was God & gave a glimpse of heaven. One of the main purposes of Jesus' incarnation was to die & take punishment for human sin. Jesus was crucified & suffered pain which means that Christians believe that God can understand human suffering as he experienced it. Christians believe Jesus rose from the dead three days after his crucifixion which demonstrates power over death. It is also evidence that Jesus was God incarnate as no other human is able to do this. The resurrection gives Christians hope that they too will be raised to life after death in heaven with Jesus. Forty days after the resurrection, the book of Acts records that Jesus returned to heaven. Some Christians believe Jesus literally returned to heaven and others see the event as symbolic, representing Jesus' success of good over evil. The ascension signaled the end of his life and work on earth but his work in heaven continues.

Teachings

Nature of God:

- 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son....' (John 3:16-18)

Trinity:

- 'And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever-the Spirit of Truth' (John 14:16-17)

Christian love:

- Jesus healing a man with leprosy (Matthew 8:1-3)

Jesus:

- 'Therefore the Lord will give you a sign; The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son...(Isaiah 7:14)
- The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)
- 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, he has risen, just as he said' (Matthew 28:4-6)

Salvation:

- 'For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.' (1 Corinthians 15:22)

Life after death:

- 'My fathers house has many rooms....' (John 14:1-3)



The Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount contains many of Jesus' teachings about how Christians should live

1. The Beatitudes

Jesus describes the attitudes/qualities that God wants Christians to develop

2. Jesus and the law

Jesus changed the law Moses brought to the Israelites from God. He said that obedience to the law must come from a person's heart.

3. True discipleship

Jesus says that Christians should be sincere in everything they do. Then they are serving God rather than trying to receive praise.

4. True righteousness

Jesus teaches that a person cannot worship God & money. He also says that a person should focus on becoming closer to God rather than judging others.

5. The narrow gateway

Jesus warns people about the difficulties of being a Christian. Christianity is the narrow pathway as there may be persecution, there are god's laws to follow & you will need to love your enemies. The wide pathway is a life without God & leads to destruction.

6. Building on solid foundations

Jesus uses the analogy of a house built on sandy foundations compared to one built on solid rock. The one built on sand washes away but the one on rock (a life with God) stands firm.

Eschatological beliefs

Belief in the second coming of Jesus is known as Parousia. The first Christians believed they were living at the end of the world so were expecting it. The end of time in the book of Revelation is described as dramatic and frightening. Some Christians are still waiting for this but most Christians believe the teaching was a way of showing that God has a plan that is not yet completed. Christians believe humans possess an immortal soul which will either be sent to heaven or hell. Roman Catholics believe in purgatory where those who are not yet pure enough go to be purified before heaven.