

CHRISTIANITY: BELIEFS AND TEACHINGS

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND SUFFERING

The problems of evil and suffering challenge belief in these qualities of God:

- If God is benevolent, why does God allow people to suffer, and to hurt others?
- If God is omnipotent, why does God not prevent evil and suffering, such as the suffering caused by natural disasters?
- If God is just, why does God allow injustice to take place?

Christians believe a just God treats people fairly, so they trust God even when things seem to be going wrong.

CREATION

- Christians believe in creation by God, the act by which God brought the universe into being.
- God, the Father, chose to design and create the earth and all life on it.
- The Holy Spirit was active in the creation (Genesis 1:1–3).
- The Word, God the Son or Jesus, was active in the creation (John 1:1–3).
- The Trinity, therefore, existed from the beginning and was involved in the creation.

Fundamentalist Christians (Creationists) believe that the statements in the Bible are literally true. Some believe the creation stories describe exactly how the universe was created. Others believe that the seven days describe seven long periods of time.

Liberal Christians believe that the creation stories are symbolic, where the main message is that God created the universe. They might look to science to understand how God did this.

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. **Matthew 1:18**

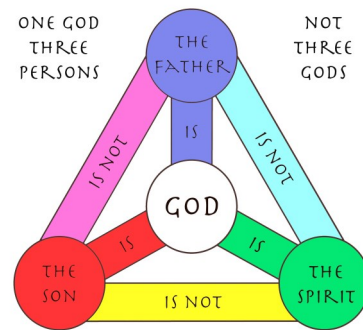
In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. **Genesis 1: 1–3**

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. **John 1:14**

GOD THE FATHER, the creator of all life, acts as a good father towards his children. He is all powerful (omnipotent), all loving (omnibenevolent), all knowing (omniscient) and present everywhere (omnipresent).

GOD THE SON became incarnate through Jesus who was both fully human while on earth and fully God at all times. Jesus is called the Son of God to show his special relationship to God the Father.

GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT is the unseen power of God at work in the world, who influences, guides and sustains life on earth.



THE INCARNATION

- Christians believe that Jesus was God in human form, a belief known as the incarnation (becoming flesh, taking a human form).
- Christians believe that Jesus was the Son of God, one of the persons of the Trinity.

On separate occasions an angel appeared to Mary and Joseph explaining that it was not an ordinary conception and it was not to be an ordinary child. The gospels of Matthew and Luke explain that Mary conceived Jesus without having sex. The virgin conception is evidence for the Christian belief that Jesus was the Son of God, part of the Trinity.

- Jesus was fully God and fully human, which helps explain his miracles and resurrection (rising from the dead).
- His words, deeds and promises have great authority because they are the word of God.
- Most Jews expected a Messiah who would come to save Israel and establish an age of peace, but do not believe that Jesus was that person.
- Christians believe that Jesus is the Messiah, but a spiritual rather than a political one.
- Gospel writers refer to Jesus as the Christ ('anointed one' or Messiah), but Jesus warned his disciples not to use the term, possibly because his opponents would have him arrested for blasphemy (claiming to be God).

THE NATURE OF GOD

- Christianity is the main religion in Great Britain.
- Christianity has three main traditions: Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox.
- There is only one God: "We believe in one God" The Nicene Creed
- God is the creator and sustainer of all that exists.
- God works throughout history and inspires people to do God's will.
- People can have a relationship with God through prayer.
- God is spirit (John 4:24) – neither male nor female – but has qualities of both.
- God is holy (set apart for a special purpose and worthy of worship).
- Jesus is God's son – the true representation of God on earth (Hebrews 1:3).

CHRISTIANITY

Catholic – based in Rome and led by the Pope.

Orthodox – split from Catholic Christianity in 1054 CE and practised in Eastern Europe.

Protestant – split from Catholic Christianity in the 16th century and branched out into different denominations (distinct groups), e.g. Baptist, Pentecostal, Methodist, United Reformed Churches. Protestants agree that the Bible is the only authority for Christians.

OMNIPOTENT



God is the Supreme Being who is all-powerful. God has unlimited authority.

JUST



God is a just judge of humankind. God will never support injustice, ill-treatment, prejudice or oppression.

BENEVOLENT



God shows his love by creating humans and caring for them. God showed his love by sending God's Son, Jesus, to earth.

afterlife: what Christians believe follows life on earth

ascension: the event, 40 days after the resurrection, when Jesus returned to God, the Father, in heaven

atonement: restoring the relationship between people and God through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus

benevolent: all-loving, all-good; a quality of God

blasphemy: a religious offence which includes claiming to be God

Catholic: a branch of Christianity, based in Rome and led by the Pope

creation: the act by which God brought the universe into being

crucifixion: 1. Roman method of execution by which criminals were fixed to a cross; 2. The execution and death of Jesus on Good Friday

Day of Judgement: a time when the world will end and every soul will be judged by God and rewarded or punished

denomination: a distinct group within the Christian faith, with its own organisation and traditions

forgiveness: showing grace and mercy and pardoning someone for what they have done wrong

grace: a quality of God which God shows to humans by providing love and support which they do not need to earn

heaven: a state of eternal happiness in the presence of God; the place of eternal peace ruled over by God

hell: the place of eternal suffering or the state of being without God

holy: separate and set apart for a special purpose by God

Holy Spirit: the third person of the Trinity whom Christians believe is the inspiring presence of God in the world

CHRISTIANITY: BELIEFS AND TEACHINGS

THE CRUCIFIXION

- Jesus was sentenced to death by Pontius Pilate
- Jesus forgave those who crucified him and promised one of the men crucified with him that he would join God in paradise.
- Jesus' body was buried in a cave-like tomb.
- Jesus' sacrifice on the cross gives hope to Christians that their sins will be forgiven if they sincerely repent.
- Christians believe that God understands human suffering because Jesus, who is God, experienced it.
- Christians accept that suffering is part of life, just as it was a part of Jesus' life.

THE RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION

- The gospels say that after Jesus died and was buried, he rose from the dead. This event is known as the resurrection.
- The ascension of Jesus took place 40 days after his resurrection, when he returned to God the Father in heaven.
- There would be no Christian faith without the resurrection.

The significance of the resurrection:

- Shows the power of good over evil and life over death.
- Means Christians' sins will be forgiven if they follow God's laws.
- Means Christians will be resurrected if they accept Jesus, so there is no need to fear death.

The significance of the ascension:

- Shows Jesus is with God in heaven.
- Paves the way for God to send the Holy Spirit to provide comfort and guidance.

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. **John 14:6**

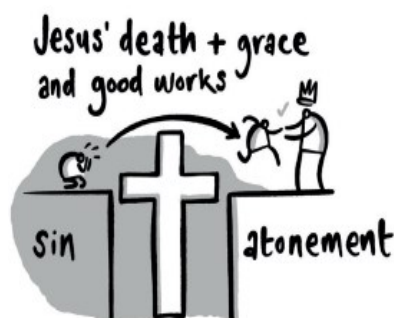
Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. **Luke 23:46**

For it is by grace you have been saved... **Ephesians 2:8**

While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. **Luke 24:51**

And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead... For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. **1 Corinthians 15:14, 20, 22**

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. **James 2:17**



For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. **Romans 6:23**

A belief in the resurrection...

...means life after death is real

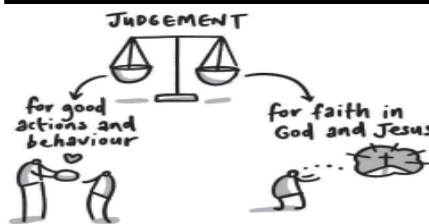
...gives hope of a future life with Jesus

...gives confidence in the face of death

...shows Christians how much God loves them

...inspires Christians to live life in the way God wants them to, so they can remain in his presence in this life and the next

I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was ill and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. **Matthew 25:35-36**



RESURRECTION AND LIFE AFTER DEATH

- Jesus' resurrection assures Christians that they too will rise and live on after death.
- Christians have differing views about what happens when a person who has died is resurrected.
- Belief in resurrection affects the way Christians live their lives today.

Different Christian views about resurrection

Some Christians believe a person's soul is resurrected soon after death.	Some other Christians believe resurrection will just be spiritual, not physical as well.
Catholic and Orthodox Christians believe in bodily resurrection. This means resurrection is both spiritual and physical: the physical body lost at death is restored and transformed into a new, spiritual body.	Other Christians believe the dead will be resurrected at some time in the future, when Jesus will return to judge everyone who has ever lived.

THE AFTERLIFE AND JUDGMENT

Christian beliefs about life after death vary, but many believe that:

- They will be **resurrected** and receive **eternal life** after they die.
- This is a gift from God, and **dependent on faith** in God.
- They will be **judged by God** at some point after they die, and either rewarded by being sent to heaven or punished by being sent to hell.
- This judgement will happen either **very soon after death** or **on the Day of Judgement**. This is a time in the future when the world will end and Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead.
- Some of these beliefs about the afterlife are found in the Apostles' Creed, which is an important statement of Christian faith: *He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead: I believe in... the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting.*

Christians believe that after they die, God will judge them on their behaviour and actions during their lifetime, as well as their faith in Jesus as God's Son.

- In the Bible, Jesus' parable of the Sheep and the Goats describes how God will judge people.
- This parable teaches Christians that in serving others, they are serving Jesus, so this is the way they should live their lives.
- Before he died, Jesus told his disciples he would prepare a place for them in heaven with God. He also made it clear that having faith in him and following his teachings was essential for being able to enter heaven.

SIN AND SALVATION

Christians can be saved from sin to gain salvation by: following God's law, receiving God's grace, and being guided by the Holy Spirit. Salvation repairs the damage caused by sin, which has separated people from God.

The two main Christian ideas about how salvation comes about:

- good works – the Old Testament makes it clear that salvation comes through faith in God and obeying God's law.
- grace – salvation is given freely by God through faith in Jesus. It is not deserved or earned, but is a free gift of God's love.

JESUS AND SALVATION

Christians believe Jesus had a crucial role to play in God's plan for salvation because his death made up for the original sin of Adam and Eve. His death, as an innocent man, was necessary to restore the relationship between God and humans, to bring them salvation. His resurrection shows that Jesus' goodness defeated the evil of sin, and was proof that God had accepted Jesus' sacrifice on behalf of people. Jesus' resurrection means humans can now receive forgiveness for their sins and gain eternal life.

Atonement removes the effects of sin and allows people to restore their relationship with God. Christians believe that through the sacrifice of his death, Jesus took the sins of all humanity on himself and paid the debt for them all.

incarnation: becoming flesh, taking a human form

justice: bringing about what is right and fair, according to the law, or making up for a wrong that has been committed

Mass: ceremony, also called Eucharist, in which the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus is celebrated using bread and wine

monotheistic: a religion that believes there is only one God

omnipotent: almighty, having unlimited power; a quality of God

original sin: an Augustine Christian doctrine that says that everyone is born with a built-in urge to do bad things and to disobey God; a doctrine within the Catholic Church

purgatory: the intermediate state where souls are cleansed in order to enter heaven

resurrection: 1. Rising from the dead; 2. Jesus rising from the dead on Easter day. An event recorded in all four gospels and the central belief of Christianity

salvation: saving the soul, deliverance from sin and admission to heaven brought about by Jesus

Satan: name for the Devil – the power and source of evil

sin: 1. Any action or thought that separates humans from God; 2. Behaviour which is against God's laws and wishes or against principles of morality

Son of God: a title used for Jesus, the second person of the Trinity; denotes the special relationship between Jesus and God the Father

the Word: term used at the beginning of John's gospel to refer to God the Son

Trinity: the belief that there are three persons in the One God; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are separate, but are also one being