

Christian Beliefs and Practices

Everything you need to know
about Christianity

Beliefs

God

4 key characteristics of God

OMINPOTENT = All Powerful & the Creator of all

OMNISCIENT = All knowing

OMNIBENEVOLENT = All loving

JUST = Fair

The parable of the Sheep and Goats – those who are good will be rewarded the bad will be punished. God treats people fairly by their actions. So Christians should fight injustice.

In the Bible God created the Universe in 7 days – a sign of omnipotence

Sent the flood for Noah

He performed miracles through Jesus

The creation of Jesus was a miracle too

So Christians accept Gods will

“When you were being formed in the world I knew you”
God is both IMMANENT and TRANSCENDENT this allows God to be part of the Universe but yet know all events that may happen in the past, present and future.
So Christians pray to God who is with them and knows them.

“God loved the world so much he gave his only Son” = AGAPE
self sacrificial love for the world.
Jesus taught about God’s love and compassion. In the Prodigal Son the son is forgiven as God loves all people, even those who turn away from him.
You get to go to heaven if you ask for forgiveness
So Christians trust in Gods love in times of suffering; and love others.

Jesus & The Trinity

- God is the Father, Son & Holy Spirit.

Incarnation = MADE FLESH

Jesus is fully human & fully God.

In the Bible God says to Jesus “You are my beloved Son” and the Holy spirit comes down.

Later after the resurrection the disciples are told to baptise

“In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit”

Jesus was with God from creation “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God and was with God”

The father is the Creator & Judge part – He made the universe and will decide who goes to heaven or hell .

The holy spirit gives us sanctity of life “Do you now know your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit” It also was present at creation

This influences Christians to pray to all parts.

Helps them to understand God understands suffering so better accept their own.

Jesus: crucifixion & resurrection

- Jesus sacrifice was important for ATONEMENT – so that all humans had the chance to be *at one* with God.
- Some people blame the Jews or Romans for Jesus' death but the events of **Holy Week** fulfilled Old Testament prophecy (although not in the way many expected) and Jesus had to die to pay for **sin**.

Christians believe that while on the cross Jesus felt the sin of every human being that has or will exist.

God needed to punish humanity but chose to take the punishment himself through Jesus.

The crucifixion influences Christians to accept suffering, the motivation behind communion, thank God for forgiveness and forgive others
“Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us”

The resurrection & ascension are the events where Jesus rose from the dead and went back up to Heaven to be with God until Judgement Day. It was a bodily resurrection – he showed his wounds to his disciples.

It was a triumph of life over death, sign of God's omnipotence & proof of the incarnation. Influences Christians to believe in life after death
“happier are those who believe without seeing”

Sin, Suffering & Salvation

Sin is the result of Adam and Eve disobeying God in the Garden of Eden and giving into temptation from Satan. We now live in an imperfect world and suffer as a result.

Accepting Jesus' sacrifice is the best way to escape sin.

This belief influences Christians to avoid temptation.

We also suffer because of freewill – we do bad things or live in places prone to natural disaster.

We need to stop suffering for ourselves.

At other times it is a test from God– in the Story of Job God and Satan tested Job but he never stopped believing in the love and mercy of God. This influences Christians to – try and stop the suffering caused by our own actions and accept that which we have no control over.

Salvation – Blinded by your Grace

Grace is the unconditional love from God which can save us from the consequences of sin and give strength.

By accepting the sacrifice of Jesus and allowing the Holy Spirit into their heart then they do not feel alone in times of suffering and are given the strength to live life as Jesus did.

Salvation can also be achieved through good works.

Life after death

- If you are good you can go straight to Heaven – paradise
- Jesus is there seated at God's right hand.
- There is no time, suffering or anything unpleasant "there shall be no tears"
- It is the direct experience of God's love.

Catholics believe in purgatory – a half way point between heaven and hell where you wait to be judged.

Those who have committed sin will go to Hell for punishment

It is a place of fire and suffering, with Satan. In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus – the Rich Man goes to hell for not helping a beggar (Lazarus) and is suffering in flames, watching Lazarus in paradise. He begs for help but Lazarus is not able to cross the pit to help him.

Some Christians do not believe that Hell is forever, it is until Judgement Day.

After judgement the souls of the wicked who have not accepted God will be annihilated

Judgement

This is outlined in the parable of the Sheep and Goats. God will judge all people fairly based on how you lived.

Some Christians believe that there will be 2 judgements – one when you die and the second on Judgement Day

Resurrection: Most Christians believe that at some point the dead will be brought back to life. Your body will be "raised imperishable"

It is not clear when this will happen, but probably at Judgement Day

Christian practices

Prayer and Worship

- Prayer is communicating with God.
- Worship is showing that God is 'worth it'
- You can worship through good deeds, music, art etc.....

Prayer can be liturgical – set patterns and rituals e.g. communion.

It can be non-liturgical – no set order or rituals but still lead by a member of the Church

Informal – Sometimes in groups like Quaker Worship or Christian festivals.

Private – one to one with God

Liturgical worship is important as it gives a pattern that anyone can follow. The Priest can act as a link between the congregation and the holy spirit e.g. Holy Communion.

It li brings the Christian community together as one.

The other forms are important as it allows people to worship to connect with God in the way they are most comfortable.

It feels more 'personal' you connect directly with God.

The Lords Prayer – was given by Jesus for those who did not know how best to pray. Jesus said not to 'babble on' as God already knows what you want to say. He encouraged prayer as a way to feel connected to God – he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane

Sacraments & the Eucharist

- Sacraments are a way of receiving the Holy Spirit from God.
- They start with Baptism and may also include; confirmation, communion, marriage, priesthood and pilgrimage.
- They are the things Christians do at different points in life to show devotion to God.
- You don't have to do them all – they are **outward signs of spiritual grace**.
- You may choose not to do any and still have God's grace through good deeds.

The Eucharist – has different names depending on the denomination: Communion, Divine Liturgy, Mass or Eucharist. It re-enacts the last supper.

They all involve the consumption of bread and wine that has been blessed in some way. E.g.

Catholics – special readings from the bible, prayers are said for the sick, the bread and wine is blessed at the altar, each person receives bread and wine which is **transubstantiated** into the body and blood of Jesus.

In the Church of England it is pretty much the same except blessings are given at a different time and it is not generally believed that the bread and wine are transubstantiated.

This is a sacrament as when you take the Eucharist you are accepting Jesus' sacrifice and are filled with the holy spirit.

Pilgrimage & Festivals

- Pilgrimage is a journey to a place of religious significance such as Lourdes; where a vision of the Virgin Mary was seen and there have been several recorded miraculous healings. And Iona; which is felt to be a spiritual place where the Christian community can come together and focus on helping others and finding a connection with God.
- Pilgrimages are important as they are: a sacrament, a way of demonstrating and strengthening faith, thanking God, express sorrow for sin and ask for forgiveness.

Festivals

There are several festivals within Christianity, they operate on a cycle.

The main 2 are Easter and Christmas – both focus on Jesus.

Christmas remembers Jesus' birth and the miracle of the incarnation. It is a happy time as it gives hope that we can be saved from Sin. It takes place in the dark months to show Jesus as the light of the world. It is a time to help others and give presents to show appreciation.

Easter remembers the end of Jesus' life. Beginning with Lent – when Jesus wandered in the desert and was tempted. Holy week – that last week where Jesus' fulfilled prophecy by entering Jerusalem as a king, then his betrayal, arrest and crucifixion. While the Good Friday celebrations are somber it is still general seen as a happy time where Jesus paid for sin and was brought back from the dead on the Saturday.

Eggs are used as symbols of new life.

The Church in the community (including poverty)

- The Church is more than just a building it is the community of the followers of Christ.

Food banks: The truth is most food banks would not run without help from a local Church or Christian community. They organise food collections which they then help distribute to those who need them, this often means working with local government who issue vouchers.

The teaching this is putting into practice is that of the parable of the sheep and Goats.

The Church is meant to embody Jesus and do his good works today.

Street pastors: are groups of Christians who go into urban areas and help those in need particularly at night. But they may also help others in need within the community. They are influenced by the Parable of the Sheep and Goats.

Being in poverty is one way of connecting with God – after all Jesus encouraged his followers to give up possessions and focus on helping others. But the Parable of the Sheep and Goats teaches to help those in need so the Church has duty to help the poor through food banks. Christian Aid helps world wide to support the poor especially after natural disasters or conflict – focussing on helping others by ending poverty.

Mission, evangelism & the world wide Church

- Missionaries: those who **educate** others about the word of God.
- Evangelists: **preach the good news** to try and convert others.
- The World Wide Church: the Church in a wide context (all Christians everywhere)

When Jesus went to heaven he told his followers to “go forth and make disciples of all nations”. The Holy Spirit gifted them with many languages to help this happen. Christians as followers of God feel it is their duty to spread the word of God.

Missionary work can be: travelling to foreign countries, helping the local community e.g. building schools while telling them about the Bible in the hope that those they help will accept Jesus.

Evangelism can be: preaching the Bible in public to encourage people to believe in God, and testifying about the power of God based on a personal experience.

The Alpha Course is one way of both of these – by actively teaching people about God and the Bible.

Pop-up churches in pubs and cafe’s are another.

Reconciliation & Christian persecution

- As Jesus came to bring people back to God so do Christians believe it is their duty to bring people back together – reconciliation. Christians were part of the effort after WW2, in South Africa and work to keep peace in Northern Ireland.
- Reconciliation involves: admission of past wrongs, forgiveness and working together to build peace.

Christian Persecution:

The early Christians had to practice their faith in secret or be killed by Jewish or Roman authorities.

Today in some places some Christians are still attacked for practicing their faith. They may also face ridicule from some Atheists as form of persecution.

Jesus was persecuted so many Christians follow his example and accept their suffering and keep the faith. Prayer being one way of dealing with persecution.

They will stand up for justice, after all God is Just, and not persecute others.

The world wide Church works to stop persecution throughout the world today e.g. supporting other faiths, sending financial support to fight legal battles.