

# Christianity: Beliefs

What do I need to know?

Beliefs and teachings

✓ **Key beliefs**

○ The nature of God:

- God as omnipotent, loving and just, and the problem of evil and suffering
- The oneness of God and the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- Different Christian beliefs about creation including the role of Word and Spirit (John 1:1-3 and Genesis 1:1-3).

○ Different Christian beliefs about the afterlife and their importance, including: resurrection and life after death; judgement, heaven and hell.

✓ **Jesus Christ and salvation**

○ Beliefs and teachings about:

- the incarnation and Jesus as the Son of God
- the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension
- sin, including original sin
- the means of salvation, including law, grace and Spirit
- the role of Christ in salvation including the idea of atonement.

## The Nature of God - What is God like?

Omnipotent - he is all-powerful	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ He created the world out of nothing</li> <li>○ He can break laws of nature to perform miracles</li> </ul>
Benevolent - he is all loving/good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ He listens to, and answers, our prayers</li> <li>○ He sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sins</li> </ul>
Just - he treats everyone equally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Jesus taught that we "are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28)</li> </ul>
Judge - He will reward the good and punish the wicked	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Bible tells us that the good will go to heaven and the bad will go to hell</li> </ul>

The problem of evil and suffering in the world challenges these ideas about God. If God is all-powerful, he could stop evil, if he is all-loving, he should want to stop evil, so why is there so much evil and suffering in the world? This problem has led atheists and humanists to argue that there is no God at all.

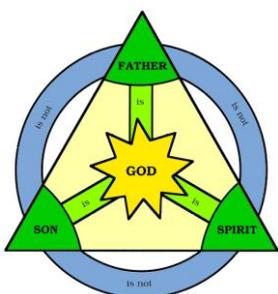
Atheists – a person who does not believe in God

Humanist – an atheist who believes that we can be good people without religion.

How might a Christian answer the problem of evil and suffering?

Evil happens due to free will	Suffering is character building
Suffering is punishment for the original sin	Suffering is a test to see if you deserve to go to heaven

## The Doctrine of the Trinity



A doctrine is an important teaching of the Church. The Doctrine of the Trinity teaches that God is ONE. However, the one true God is seen in three different forms - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**God the Father** - is the transcendent God who is outside of the physical world and almost impossible to know. We can only know this God if He chooses to reveal Himself through special revelation, such as a miracle or a vision.

**God the Son** - is Jesus Christ who came to earth as *God incarnate* or *in the flesh*. Christians believe that Jesus was 100% human and 100% divine. He provides a unique opportunity for humans to understand God as He was a human being just like them, but was also God.

**God the Holy Spirit** - is the part of God which remained on earth after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension into heaven (Christians believe that Jesus now sits at the right hand of God outside of the physical world). The Holy Spirit listens to peoples' prayers and provides them with gifts of courage and hope during difficult times.

#### Key Terms:

Transcendent	Outside the physical world of time and space
Immanent	Inside the physical world
Doctrine of the Incarnation	Jesus was fully human <b>and</b> fully divine
Special revelation	God directly revealing himself to us. E.g. miracles and visions



## Creation

### Genesis 1: 1-3

#### The Beginning

*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.*

This passage shows God as a transcendent, omnipotent creator God who is powerful enough to create the whole world out of nothing.

### John 1: 1-3

#### The Word Became Flesh

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*

The 'Word' in this passage is Jesus. This shows that Jesus has existed with God forever. He has always been part of God and the world could not have been made without him.

Scientific ideas of the Big Bang and Evolution are very different to the Biblical account of creation and atheists believe that science has shown that God did not create the world and does not exist. However, most Christians, including Roman Catholic Christians, believe that God made the world through the processes of the Big Bang and Evolution. They feel that science tells us *how* the world was created, but the Bible tells us *why*.

Literal Christian ideas on creation	Liberal Christian ideas on creation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literal Christians are creationists. They believe that the Bible tells us <i>exactly</i> how God made the world.</li> <li>• The Bible is scientific fact. God made the world out of nothing in 6 days.</li> <li>• Big Bang and evolutionary theories are tricks of the Devil to turn us away from the truth of God.</li> <li>• <u>Only a small minority of Christians hold this view. They are known as Creationists</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Liberal Christians believe that the Bible contains stories, poems and myths about God which should not be taken as literal fact.</li> <li>• The Bible should be interpreted symbolically.</li> <li>• The creation story tells us that God did make the world and wants a relationship with us. However, science tells us <i>how</i> the world was made (through Big Bang and evolution).</li> <li>• <u>The majority of Christians believe that scientific ideas of creation are perfectly compatible with Christianity, including Roman Catholic Christians and members of the Church of England.</u></li> </ul>

## Resurrection and the afterlife

*"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me shall live even if he dies."*

John 11:25

*"These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

Matthew 24: 46

Christians believe that Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins and allow us to have eternal life with God in heaven. They believe that Jesus was resurrected after death and this gives them hope that they too will be resurrected and will have life after death with God in heaven (whilst the wicked will face eternal life in hell). Some Christians believe in a bodily resurrection, whilst others believe that the resurrection will be spiritual:

## Bodily resurrection

Some Christians believe that the resurrection is a resurrection of the physical body. They believe that Jesus will come back to earth on the Day of Judgement and everyone will be raised from their graves so that he can decide whether to send them to heaven or hell. Those who have been good will go to heaven and those who have been bad will go to hell.

### Problems

- Bodies decay - the physical bodies of those who have died in the past have now turned back to dust.
- If a person died of a physical injury, will that injury still be with them after they have been resurrected?
- Where do these physical bodies go? If the bodies are physical, there must be a physical place of heaven.

## Spiritual resurrection

Most Christians believe that it is the soul which lives on after death; they feel that the physical body is for this life not the afterlife. Jesus and St Paul both had teachings which suggest a spiritual rather than physical resurrection. For example, St Paul taught that there are 'earthly bodies' and 'heavenly bodies' which are different things. St Paul also taught Christians not to worry too much about the afterlife as this would all be sorted out by God. We should only worry about following the teachings of Jesus and being good Christians.

### Problems

- We will really be 'us' without our physical body in the afterlife? How will we recognise our loved ones in heaven if they don't look the way they do in this life?
- There is no evidence of the existence of a 'soul' - all we can experience is the physical body.



### What do atheists and humanists think of resurrection and afterlife?

Atheists and humanists believe that the idea of resurrection and the afterlife is unscientific. There is no evidence for an afterlife and the idea of resurrection (either bodily or spiritual) is ridiculous. The body decays at death and so cannot be resurrection. The idea of a spiritual resurrection is also unsound as there is absolutely no evidence that we have a soul. All humans are flesh and blood. Our role in this life is to be good and help others and we should enjoy this life whilst we have it as it is the only one. A humanist funeral focuses purely on the achievements of the deceased in *this* life.

Problem - Many people believe that there must be something after death.

## Judgement, Heaven and Hell

Christianity teaches that Jesus will return from heaven on the Day of Judgement, the last day (this is taught in the *Christian Creeds* - statements of belief). Some Christians interpret this **literally**, others believe that Jesus' teaching on judgement was **symbolic** - humans will be held to account for their actions on earth but there won't be an actual *day* of judgement when Jesus returns.

Roman Catholic Christians believe that there are two judgements, the **particular judgement** which happens straight after death and the **general judgement** which will happen when Jesus returns on the Day of Judgement. At the particular judgement, souls will wait to be reunited with their physical bodies. They will wait in comfort if they have lived a good life and in torment (in a place called purgatory) if they have been sinful.

After the Day of Judgement, Christians believe that Jesus will send the good to heaven. Heaven is believed to be a place of peace and happiness where people are reunited with their loved ones. The best part of heaven is that you are with God. Some Christians interpret Biblical writing on heaven literally, believing that it is a physical place. However, others believe that heaven is symbolic, it is not a place, but a state of being at peace and with God.

The Bible teaches that hell is place of fire and torment where the sinful make up for their actions on earth. Christianity teaches that God is **just** and so will make sure that those who have sinned and caused the suffering of others are punished. Matthew's Gospel describes hell as a place of 'weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 13:50). Christians who have been hurt by others may feel better knowing that they will be punished by God in the afterlife.

Many contemporary Christians do not believe in hell as a physical place but see Biblical descriptions of hell as symbolic. They feel that the worst punishment a sinner can have is separation from God and so hell is simply an afterlife in which God is not present. They reject hell as a place of physical punishment as they feel that this idea is incompatible with belief in an all-loving and forgiving God.

As Christians believe that God will reward the good in heaven and punish the bad in hell, they try to follow God's teachings from the Bible and attend Church to make sure that they understand how they should live in order to get to heaven. They also want to help others to get into heaven and avoid hell and so they teach others the message of Jesus and try to encourage them to live according to the commandments and parables given by Christ.

Atheists and humanists believe that there is no judgement and no afterlife. They feel that the fact that there is no afterlife does not mean that people will not behave well - humans, they argue, have the capacity to be good and treat others well without the threat of hell. As there is no evidence for the afterlife, they argue, we should reject such a notion and concentrate on making this life on earth as pleasant as possible as it is the only life we will have.

The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats is a parable told by Jesus to explain what will happen at the end of time. It means that he will come back to earth and separate the good people from the bad people, with the good following him to heaven and the bad going down to hell.



The Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25: 31-46)  
31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.  
32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left."

## What do the Christian creeds say about Judgement, Heaven and Hell?

*We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.*

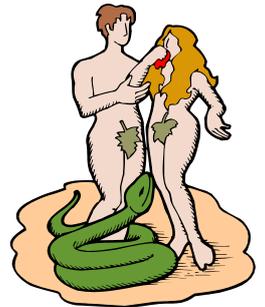
*We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.*

*We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.*



## What does the Bible say about sin?

- God made a perfect world for humans - free from sin or suffering.
- God gave humans the gift of freewill to make their own decisions
- Adam and Eve were permitted to do anything they wanted in the Garden of Eden, apart from eat the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge.
- Satan appeared to Eve in the form of a serpent and tempted her to convince Adam to eat from the tree so that they could have the knowledge of God.
- Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge and God was furious with them. Their act of disobedience is known as the **original sin**.
- He banished them from the Garden, causing them to live in a difficult world in which death occurred, crops sometimes did not grow and childbirth was painful.
- The worst punishment for Adam and Eve was their separation from God.
- The original sin of Adam and Eve is believed to have been passed on to all future humans - we all now contain sin within us.



- When we use our free will to make moral choices, it is always more likely that we will choose sin as we already contain sin within.
- Examples of sins could be breaking one of the Ten Commandments, such as *Thou shalt not steal*.
- Roman Catholic Christians believe in the sacrament of confession - they confess their sins to a priest regularly so that God will forgive them and they can still gain entry into heaven.

Different Christian views:

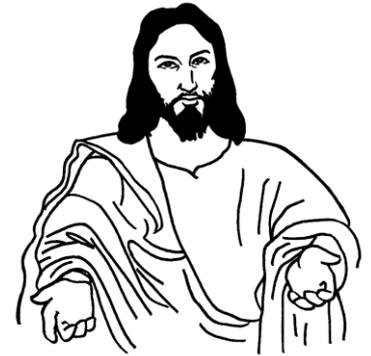
Although some Christians interpret the Genesis account of the Original Sin literally, many feel that it is **symbolic** (it is not factual, but has a deeper meaning). They feel that the story is there to help us to understand that sin and resulting suffering occur because of human free will. As God is different to us, he is separate from us and so it is difficult for us to make good moral choices.

## The Doctrine of the Incarnation

"The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us.

We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth". (John 1:14)

The Doctrine of the Incarnation teaches that Jesus was God on earth. He was 100% divine (God) and 100% human.



Examples of Jesus as divine	Examples of Jesus as human
Jesus' mother Mary was a virgin – Angel Gabriel told Mary she would conceive and give birth to God's son	Jesus was born from his mother and died a human death
Jesus told humans how to get to heaven in his Parable of the Good Samaritan (Love God and love your neighbour).	Christians pray to Jesus because they believe that he understands their suffering as he suffered himself as a human being (particularly when he was crucified)
Christians pray to Jesus because they believe he has the power to answer their prayers	Jesus had human emotions. For example, when people were behaving disrespectfully in the Temple, he got angry.
Jesus was resurrected after death (he came back to life).	

Why is the Doctrine of the Incarnation important to Christianity?

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate from the Tree of Knowledge, their relationship with God was broken. They were tainted with the Original Sin, making them choose more and more sin, moving them further and further away from God. By

dying on the cross for all humans, past, present and future, Jesus became a human who performed such a loving act of self-sacrifice that God was able to forgive humans for their sin and allow them entry into heaven after death.

As a human, Jesus provides for us a role model of good behaviour to help us use our free will to make good moral choices. As divine, Jesus is able to give us teaching on how to please God and gain entry into heaven.

## The Crucifixion - Mark 15: 21-39



### Jesus Is Crucified

On the way they met a man named Simon, who was coming into the city from the country, and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus' cross. (Simon was from Cyrene and was the father of Alexander and Rufus.) They took Jesus to a place called Golgotha, which means "The Place of the Skull." There they tried to give him wine mixed with a drug called myrrh, but Jesus would not drink it. Then they crucified him and divided his clothes among themselves, throwing dice to see who would get which piece of clothing. It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The notice of the accusation against him said: "The King of the Jews." They also crucified two bandits with Jesus, one on his right and the other on his left.

People passing by shook their heads and hurled insults at Jesus: "Aha! You were going to tear down the Temple and build it back up in three days! Now come down from the cross and save yourself!"

In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the Law made fun of Jesus, saying to one another, "He saved others, but he cannot save himself! Let us see the Messiah, the king of Israel, come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him!"

And the two who were crucified with Jesus insulted him also.

### The Death of Jesus

At noon the whole country was covered with darkness, which lasted for three hours. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud shout, "*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*" which means, "My God, my God, why did you abandon me?"

Some of the people there heard him and said, "Listen, he is calling for Elijah!" One of them ran up with a sponge, soaked it in cheap wine, and put it on the end of a stick. Then he held it

up to Jesus' lips and said, "Wait! Let us see if Elijah is coming to bring him down from the cross!"

With a loud cry Jesus died.

The curtain hanging in the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. <sup>39</sup> The army officer who was standing there in front of the cross saw how Jesus had died. <sup>[b]</sup> "This man was really the Son of God!" he said.

### How does Jesus' crucifixion affect Christians today?

Christians today are inspired to be like Jesus and make sacrifices for other people. They may choose to sacrifice money, time and energy to help others in trying to be like Jesus who sacrificed his life for all humans. Examples of Christians who have tried to be like Jesus by making sacrifices for others include:

- Mother Teresa - who spent lots of time and energy helping the poor in Calcutta. She also put herself in danger by helping people with contagious diseases such as leprosy and TB.
- Oscar Romero - spoke out against the corrupt government of El Salvador and their treatment of the poor. He was assassinated in 1980



## The resurrection

After his death, Jesus' body was taken down from the cross and was put into a rock tomb. As the Sabbath was about to start and work is forbidden on the Sabbath), Jesus' body could not be prepared for burial straight away. A huge rock was placed over the tomb to protect the body for the Sabbath day. After the Sabbath, the women returned to the tomb to wash Jesus' body. However, they found that the stone had moved and Jesus was not in the tomb.

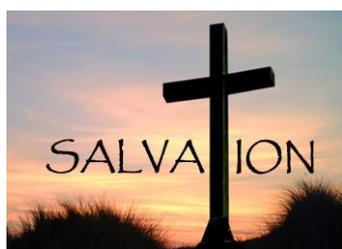
Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene and told her that he was risen from the dead. Mary returned to the disciples to tell them what she had seen. Over the next 40 days, Jesus appeared to the disciples on several occasions. Jesus was seen as a physical person rather than a ghostly figure.

After forty days, Jesus ascended (went up) to heaven. Many Christians see the description of the ascension of Jesus' into heaven as symbolic, however, some Christians do believe that the disciples really saw Jesus rising up in the sky to return to God.

Jesus' resurrection and ascension are extremely important to Christianity. The resurrection reveals that Jesus was indeed the Son of God and the one who has power over death. Christians therefore believe that if they follow Jesus' example and teaching, they too will live forever in heaven with God.

It is reasonable to believe in Jesus' resurrection	It is not reasonable to believe in Jesus' resurrection
There were eye witnesses, such as the disciples	The disciples wanted to believe that Jesus had come back from the dead and so they allowed themselves to believe something that was not true.
Saul who became St Paul had a vision of the resurrected Christ. He went from persecuting Christians to being one of the most influential Christians who ever lived.	All of our experiences of the world reveal that people do not come back from the dead.
The disciples went on to spread the word of the resurrected Jesus throughout the world, despite this being dangerous. All but one (John) of them was put to death.	It seems likely that the disciples were lying about seeing the resurrected Jesus as they wanted people to believe in him and his teachings (much more likely that a man coming back from the dead!)

## Salvation and atonement



### Key Words:

**Atonement:** The action of making amends for wrong-doing; the idea of being at one with God

**Salvation:** The saving of the soul from sin

**Reconciliation:** The process of making people in conflict friendly again

**Repentance:** To feel regret for one's sin

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”*

**John 3:16**

This passage from the Bible reveals that God wanted to be reconciled with humans after the Original Sin of Adam and Eve. He wants to provide them with a chance to repent and atone for their sins so that he can forgive them and provide them with salvation in heaven. Jesus comes to earth to die on the cross to enable God to forgive humans and allow them entry into heaven.

# How do we achieve salvation?

## Salvation through grace and spirit

'Grace' refers to the unconditional love that God shows to everyone, even when they don't deserve it. God loves us no matter what we do and wishes for every one of us to be saved and go to heaven. In the Parable of the Lost Son, Jesus teaches us that God is a loving father who will welcome anyone back to him as his family no matter what they do - all they have to do is ask for forgiveness. St Paul is an example of someone who did bad things (persecuted and killed Christians) but was saved by Jesus who appeared to him on the road to Damascus.

Christians believe that salvation through grace and spirit was made possible by Jesus when he died for the sins of humankind on the cross. The Holy Spirit continues to provide Christians with grace and helps them to show the same love to others as Jesus showed to them. Some Christians therefore believe that everyone will be saved by God, even though they might not follow his teachings and commandments.

## Salvation through law

Some Christians believe that the only way to be saved is through following the laws, commandments and teachings of God. Only those who complete good works by serving others and keep to the Ten Commandments and Jesus' command to "love God and love your neighbour" will be granted a place in heaven.

The Christian church places great emphasis on the importance of behaving in a way which pleases God and Christian church services contain Bible readings and sermons with the purpose of instructing the congregation in how they should behave if they want to be saved and gain entry into heaven. Some Christians feel that people who do not perform good works and do not obey the laws of God will be punished by being sent to hell on Judgement Day. We can see this idea in Jesus' Parable of the Sheep and the Goats which tells of Jesus returning to earth on the last day and sending some (the goats) to hell and others (the good sheep) to heaven. This parable clearly does not suggest that everyone will receive salvation from God - only the good will be rewarded in heaven.

## Exam questions

### 1 mark

Which one of the following is the book in the Bible in which the story of Creation can be found?

A Exodus. B Genesis. C Proverbs. D Revelation.

1 Which one of the following is the idea that God is three-in-one?

A Atonement. B Incarnation. C Salvation. D Trinity.

### 2 mark

Give two reasons why the disciples believed Jesus was alive after his resurrection.

Give two qualities which Christians believe describe the nature of God.

### 4 mark

Explain two ways in which belief in the resurrection of Jesus influences Christians today.

Explain two ways in which the belief that God is just influences Christians today.

### 5 mark

Explain two Christian teachings about the means of salvation.

Explain two Christian teachings about judgement.

### 12 mark

'If God were loving, there would be no suffering in the world.' Evaluate this statement. In your answer you should: • refer to Christian teaching • give reasoned arguments to support this statement • give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view • reach a justified conclusion.

'The Bible tells Christians all they need to know about God's creation.' Evaluate this statement. In your answer you should: • refer to Christian teaching • give reasoned arguments to support this statement • give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view • reach a justified conclusion.