



Course Companion for GCSE OCR (Short Course)

Christianity: Beliefs and Teachings

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Contents

Thank You for Choosing ZigZag Education.....	ii
Teacher Feedback Opportunity.....	iii
Terms and Conditions of Use	iv
Teacher’s Introduction.....	1
Introduction to the Course and How to Answer Exam Questions.....	2
Beliefs and Teachings.....	3
Nature of God	3
Concept of God as a Trinity of Persons	9
Biblical Accounts of Creation.....	14
The Problem of Evil and Suffering and a Loving and Righteous God	18
Jesus Christ.....	23
Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension.....	34
The Concept of Salvation.....	42
Eschatological Beliefs and Teachings.....	48
Summary for Beliefs and Teachings.....	56
Answers	57

Teacher's Introduction

This resource has been designed to support the learning and teaching of OCR GCSE Religious Studies, Section A. Christianity Beliefs and Teachings are covered, and questions and activities are included to test students' knowledge and ability, and to help them engage with the topics.

The information is comprehensive, and images help to illustrate concepts. Keywords and Bible quotes are included to help students to understand the material and to further their grasp of the subjects. A brief introduction to the course and answering exam questions is provided for students at the start, and answers and a mark scheme are included at the end.

This course companion can be used in full as an alternative or complement to a textbook, as a class text or for independent learning or revision. Alternatively, teachers might use a section for a specific classroom activity or homework.

This specification covers a particularly broad range, in terms of time periods covered and different aspects of a Christian's faith and Christianity's impact on their lives. This should both inform students and develop their thinking, enabling them to approach issues from different points of view.

We have sought a balance between explaining relevant concepts in sufficient detail without oversimplification, while not going beyond GCSE level and becoming too complicated. Throughout we have tried to present all views in a neutral and informative way.

Hopefully this resource will encourage students in their learning and help to prepare them for their exams. It should take the pressure away from teachers by providing the bulk of the content which they want to teach to their class.

June 2017

Remember!

Always check the exam board's website for new information, including changes to the specification and sample assessment material.

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Register your email address to receive any future free updates* made to this resource or other Religious Studies resources your school has purchased, and details of any promotions for your subject.

* resulting from minor specification changes, suggestions from teachers and peer reviews, or occasional errors reported by customers

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Introduction to the Course and How to Questions

This course aims to cover many aspects of Christianity and to assess your understanding. You should be aware that Christianity is one of many different beliefs and traditions in Great Britain, alongside Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sikhism. Christianity is currently the largest religion in the UK and is closely linked with the culture.

The range of material covers several subject areas surrounding what Christians believe, with reference to the importance of various aspects of Christianity to Christians; the influence of Christianity on Christians today; and different points of view from within Christianity. These are based on the Bible, Christian scripture.

This course companion is designed to equip you with the information you need to develop your knowledge and ability to answer related questions. Not all the questions and answers are in exam-style, but those which are should be answered in particular ways.

The exam board will ask you to give quick facts and statements, as well as asking you to 'describe' and 'outline'. They will also ask you to 'explain' and 'discuss' beliefs, opinions and practices. When answering all questions it is important to try to use technical terms where possible, and to write well, using both a style that is easy to follow and correct spelling and grammar. More or less writing will be required, depending on the number of marks. Try to spend as little time as possible on the shorter questions to allow yourself more time for the longer ones.

There will be one part, including three 3-mark questions, one 6-mark question, and one 15-mark question. These questions could be on any material which you have learnt.

Three extra marks are given for spelling, punctuation and grammar on the 15-mark question. This also goes for the other religion you study.

Hopefully, this resource will be interesting and informative, and help you to achieve good results.

The **3-mark questions** have varied formats. You could be asked to describe something, such as a term; to outline a belief/teaching; to state or name three things; or to give three reasons for something. You might be asked what something is, how something happened, or why something is the case / is important.

Do not let the different wording throw you off – essentially there are two formats. In one, you will be asked to give three things, in which case you can be brief about each point – you will get 1 mark for each of the three things. In the other, you will be asked for one thing – therefore you need to go into some more detail. Make sure that you make at least three points or examples about the one thing to get three marks.

The **6-mark question** asks you to explain something – often the importance of something, such as a belief or practice. However, it could also ask you to give reasons for different views, or how/why something is done. For these questions you must show both knowledge and understanding, and analysis and evaluation. You cannot get top marks without analysis and evaluation. You may get a mark for making a point, developing it, giving an example, or making some analysis.

The **15-mark question** is the longest. You will need to discuss a statement. This means you need to argue **for** and **against** the statement (so agreeing with it, and also suggesting an alternative). You should come up with good reasons for all the points you make and link them together well. You should come up with a convincing side of the argument (based on the arguments you have given!) and saying you need to refer to sources of wisdom and authority, such as the Bible or church teaching. You should also refer to similar and different views within Christianity and analyse and evaluate them.

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Beliefs and Teachings

A key part of any religion is its beliefs and teachings. These are particularly especially mainstream branches, compared to many other world religions (e.g. Buddhism) which can be seen to be more practice-focused. Teachings can be found in the **Bible, Old Testament** and **New Testament**; from the Church, often explained by **theologians** and philosophers who have sought to answer difficult questions. Different Christians, and different Church **denominations**, have different beliefs, different teachings and on which teachings they accept.

Keywords:

- ♦ **Bible** – the Christian Scriptures, made up of the Old and New Testaments
- ♦ **creed** – a statement of belief
- ♦ **denomination** – a particular branch within a religion, e.g. Catholicism, Anglicanism
- ♦ **New Testament** – section of the Bible concerning the life of Jesus and his early church
- ♦ **Old Testament** – section of the Bible concerning the time before the birth of Jesus
- ♦ **theologian** – someone who studies religion and God

Nature of God

Christians have many different beliefs about the nature of God – what God is like, on the basis in the Bible, and also in Christian tradition. Not all beliefs fit neatly with each other, but they have reasons for believing that God has characteristics which might seem to contradict each other.

Keywords:

- ♦ **apostles** – Jesus' disciples who had had an encounter with him after his resurrection, and were the first Christians
- ♦ **Book of Job** – a book in the Bible about one man's suffering
- ♦ **disciples** – followers, here of Jesus, often referring to his closest twelve male followers
- ♦ **Evangelical** – a type of Protestant (usually), often concerned with being spiritually pure
- ♦ **faith** – here, belief in God and trust in him
- ♦ **free will** – the ability to choose what to do
- ♦ **idolatry** – worshipping something other than God, which is forbidden in Christianity
- ♦ **just** – fair, right and good
- ♦ **law (Jewish)** – what the Jews followed in order to please God. Many Christians believe that Jesus did this by dying and rising, so that Christians do not have to follow it anymore
- ♦ **miracle** – in Christianity, something which appears to be done by God and seen to be beyond natural explanation
- ♦ **parables** – stories with an inner meaning, for the purpose of teaching
- ♦ **prayer** – communication with God
- ♦ **prophets** – people who speak to God and/or can predict the future
- ♦ **salvation** – being saved, having been saved; in Christianity, Jesus brought this about by dying and rising
- ♦ **sin** – something that separates people from God, going against God's will
- ♦ **Ten Commandments** – ten important rules given to the prophet Moses by God
- ♦ **Trinity** – the concept that God is one being, but three persons
- ♦ **vision** – a type of experience where God, or a messenger of God or sign from God, is seen

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Meaning of Key Terms

Christians believe that God is:

◆ Benevolent

Christians believe that God is loving (benevolent). Many believe that he is all-loving and that his love is without limits. God's love is referred to throughout the Bible. God guides and cares for the Jewish people, and helps them in times of trouble. This is further in the **New Testament** – Christians believe that God sent his son, Jesus. Christians believe that this allowed humans to be **saved** from **sin**, and to have a chance at eternal life with God and eternal life. They feel that this is the ultimate expression of love –

'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to be judged, but in order that the world might be saved through him.' (John 3:16-17 NRSV)

'No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.' (1 John 3:16 NRSV)

◆ Omniscient

Many Christians believe that God is all-knowing (omniscient). Most feel that God is to know about the world, and also knows everyone's thoughts and feelings. Some feel that God knows the future. Some feel that he knows exactly what will happen, and which people will make, and the time at which they will make them. Others feel that God has knowledge of what will happen, but he does not know in advance every decision we will make, or everything which will happen to someone. God's knowledge is demonstrated when he knows where Jonah has run away to (Jonah 1), and when Jesus knew the thoughts of the Pharisees (e.g. Matthew 9:3-5). God shows his knowledge in the **Book of Job**, where God asks Job if he has knowledge of many ways of the world; indicating that God knows things which humans do not (Job 38-42). Jesus also taught about God's knowledge, such as the number of hairs on someone's head, and of all that is hidden (Matthew 10:29-31).

'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you...' (Jeremiah 1:5 NRSV)

'... God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.' (1 John 3:20 NRSV)

◆ Omnipotent

Christians all believe that God is powerful, and many believe that he is all-powerful (omnipotent). Most believe that this power is physical and spiritual e.g. that God created the world, and can also give people inner strength and help them to make decisions. The Bible demonstrates God's power; it teaches that he sent plagues on Egypt (Exodus 7-12); helped the Jewish people to win in battle (in several books of the Old Testament); raised Jesus from the dead (see the end of the Gospels); and showed his power in many other ways. Those Christians who knew Jesus believed that they experienced God's power first hand, and those who feel that they have experienced **miracles** will also feel that they have experienced God's power. Many Christians feel that



Artist's impression of the Resurrection

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God is omnipotent because they cannot imagine how much power it must have to create the universe – they can see the extent of God's creation in nature.

'It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his understanding stretched out the heavens.' (Jeremiah 10:12 NRSV)

'But Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible." (Matthew 19:26 NRSV)

◆ A judge

Christians believe that God judges all humans – he evaluates their behaviour. God is seen to be **just** – he will do what is fair and right, and this involves rewarding and punishing. Many Christians feel that ultimate judgement will come at the end of their lives and/or at the end of time. They believe that God will judge and decide who is good and bad – he will reward the good and punish the bad. Jesus taught that God is concerned with both thoughts and actions, and that he will judge people at the end of time based on whether or not they help others. Jesus also teaches that those who do not believe in him will be judged harshly.

'You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery." But I say to you that anyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.' (Matthew 5:27-28 NRSV)

'When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will separate the righteous from the wicked. The righteous will go away to inherit the kingdom prepared for them, but the wicked will go away to suffer punishment. Just as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, so the Son of Man will separate the righteous from the wicked.' (Matthew 25:31-46 NRSV)

'Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe in him will be condemned because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.' (John 3:18 NRSV)

◆ Eternal

Christians believe that God is eternal – that he has always existed and always will exist. God is very different from humans – he has not been created by someone else, and he does not die.

'Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, everlasting to everlasting you are God.' (Psalm 90:2 NRSV)

◆ Transcendent

Many Christians believe that God is transcendent; outside of time and space. The Bible describes God as transcendent, and Christians can understand that God cannot be contained within it. Similarly, if God knows what is going on in the future, he is not contained within time.

'Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down on the earth, who is not contained within time.' (Psalm 113:5-6 NRSV)

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◆ Immanent

Many Christians believe that God is immanent; active in the world, and know that they have experienced **visions** and/or miracles, or that their **prayers** have happened, they would require God to be active in the world – God was in the world to interact with people in the Old Testament, and to come to Earth.

“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel”, which means, “God is with us.” (Matthew 1:23 NRSV)



Jesus

◆ Personal

Most Christians believe that God is a personal God, who wants to have a relationship with humanity, as they believe he has spoken to humans throughout time (recorded in the Bible) and sent his son Jesus to make sure that he and humans could have a complete relationship. God has made himself known, for example through visions and Jesus, and through other means such as scripture and prayer.

“But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, and your sons’ wives with you.” (Genesis 6:18 NRSV)

‘And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory only son, full of grace and truth.’ (John 1:14 NRSV)

◆ Forgiving

Christians believe that God is forgiving, and that Jesus died for the forgiven that if they repent of their sins then God will accept their faults and will not punish them. The Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11–32 teaches that God is like a loving father, who turns away from their sin and returns to him. Christians may also believe that others, God will not forgive them, as Jesus taught this when he taught his disciples (Matthew 6:9–15). (This may motivate them to forgive, as they do not want to be forgiven.)

‘But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion around him and kissed him.’ (Luke 15:20 NRSV)

‘And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors... For if you do not forgive your trespasses, your heavenly Father will also not forgive you; but if you do forgive your trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.’ (Matthew 6:12, 14–15 NRSV)

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Christianity is:

◆ Monotheistic

This means that Christians believe in one God. Christians do not believe in **idols**. This is forbidden in the Old Testament in the first two of the Ten Commandments which many Christians try to follow.

‘I am the LORD your God... you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol... You shall not bow down to them or worship them...’ (Exodus 20:2–5)

Significance of these Characteristics

The belief that God has these characteristics is very significant for Christians.

God being **benevolent** and **forgiving** is significant because Christians feel that God is caring. They can put **faith** in him that he will protect them, and will not punish them for their wrong and try to do better – this can be comforting. Many Christians feel that God gives them lives and liberates them. Believing that God is loving and forgiving also inspires Christians to love and forgive others, to help them when they are in difficulty and let go of grudges.

God’s **omniscience**, **omnipotence** and **eternity** are significant to Christians because of his power. They may be in awe of him. It means that Christians feel that they can rely on God beyond human limitations. They are also likely to be grateful to God for creation.

It is significant for Christians that God is a **judge** because this means that God will judge their behaviour – just because God is loving does not mean that anything goes. Christians want to live good lives so that God will not judge them harshly.

Transcendence is a significant characteristic because it reminds Christians that God is not limited by their lives. **Immanence** is an important characteristic because it reminds Christians that God is present in their lives. There are several approaches to the apparent contradiction between a God who is both immanent and transcendent. Most Christians believe that God is a **Trinity** (three persons), and the Catholic Church teaches that God the Father is transcendent, while God the Son and God the Spirit are immanent. This is partly due to the teaching of St Paul. However some other Christians feel that all persons of God are, somehow, able to be outside of time and space, but be active in the world at the same time – because they believe that as God is omnipotent, he would not be limited in any way.

‘Am I a God near by, says the LORD, and not a God far off? Who can hide in secret places? says the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the LORD.’

God being **personal** is significant to Christians because it means that they can have a relationship with him and interact with him in their everyday lives.

Monotheism is very significant for Christians, because it affects their worship. Christians believe that they should focus on God and should not place too high an importance on or worship another person or object, because this comes between them and God. This is significant to Christianity because it differs from the religion practised through the Old Testament – there is evidence that the Jewish people in much of the Old Testament worshipped their God, but believed in the existence of other gods, and sometimes worshipped them. Christianity teaches strongly (as does modern-day Judaism) that no other gods exist.

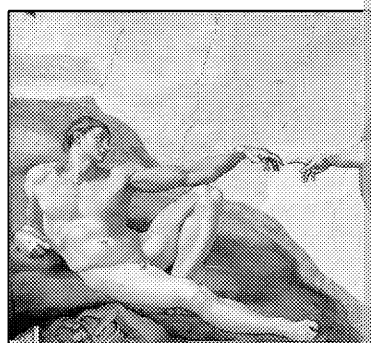
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Common and Divergent Emphases on these Characteristics by Different Christians

All Christians believe that God is **benevolent** and **forgiving**, and that God is a **strict master** (though they still see him as loving). Conservative Christians tend to emphasise obedience to exact teachings of a **strict master** (though they still see him as loving). Conservative Christians of many **denominations**, but there are many conservative Catholics and Orthodox Christians who are **evangelical** Christians. More liberal Christians tend to emphasise God's love and his judgement. Protestant churches such as the Methodist Church and the Quakers and Pentecostal Christians emphasise God as **personal**, because they live their lives and try to be guided by God directly. While (most) Christians feel a relationship with God and accept his **immanence**, churches such as the Catholic Church are more likely to emphasise God's **transcendence**; the difference between the inability to fully know God, as well as they emphasise the mystery of God.

Calvinists emphasise God's **omnipotence** and **omniscience** because they believe that God has already chosen who will be **saved** (so he knows what will happen to humans, and as he created them, he set this in motion). Some Christians who believe in complete **free will**, where humans always have the option to choose, or reject, salvation, will emphasise God's omniscience less, as his omniscience can be taken to contradict real free will (if God knows what you will do before you choose it, did you really choose it?). Christians who do not see God as omnipotent, but rather see him as having spiritual power over their hearts and minds) but not complete physical power.



Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* creating human

Often these different interpretations are based on different interpretations of biblical passages. Those Christians who focus on God as benevolent, forgiving, immanent, emphasise the person of Jesus, immanent in the world and providing a personal relationship. They feel that his main teachings are on love and forgiveness. They will also emphasise his power of love rather than his physical power.

Christians who emphasise God's transcendence, knowledge, physical power and judgement often place greater importance on the details of the **Old Testament**. God's physical power, his awesomeness, and his judgement are clearly demonstrated in the Old Testament. They also take Jesus' teachings about judgement very seriously.

All Christians believe in one God, but while mainstream Christians believe in one God, some (Unitarians) believe that this is not really believing in one God – it is believing in many gods, which other Christians do. This is because they do not believe that there is one God in this way, and feel that it has been interpreted inaccurately (or that some people have misunderstood it).

Quick Questions

- 1) What does God being omnipotent mean?
- 2) Why is the Christian God seen as a judge?

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Concept of God as a Trinity of P

The **Trinity** is a concept within Christianity which refers to the belief that the Christian God is both *one* being and *three* persons at the same time. The three persons are God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. However, there is unity within God – there are not three separate gods. This seems rather confusing, and it has caused much controversy and debate within Christianity. Not all Christians believe in the Trinity, but most do.

Important

The persons of God are usually seen as distinct. Christians may believe that God is not gendered, but the Father is attributed to him by a male name. Genesis 1:27 says that both men and women are made in God's image, implying that God is not gendered. Christianity teaches the danger of seeing God as a human figure – he is seen as much more than a human character.

Keywords:

- ◆ **Ascension** – when Jesus was raised up into heaven after his resurrection
- ◆ **baptism** – here, immersion in water to symbolise spiritual cleansing
- ◆ **divine** – godly, above humanity
- ◆ **gospel** – means 'good news'; the four books at the start of the New Testament
- ◆ **ministry** – here, Jesus' work of teaching and healing
- ◆ **Pentecost** – when the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples after Jesus' ascension
- ◆ **resurrection** – coming back to life after dying; Christians believe Jesus was resurrected

The Trinity and the Relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are seen as one being, but three persons. As such, they may share knowledge, but also interact with each other.

There is biblical support for different persons of God the Trinity.

- ◆ Genesis, the first book of the Bible, refers to both 'God' and 'the spirit of God' (Genesis 1:1–2 NRSV).
- ◆ In the **New Testament** Jesus addresses the creator God, who was worshipped by the Jews, as 'Father' (e.g. Matthew 5:16 NRSV).
- ◆ Jesus was referred to in the **Gospels** as the 'Son of God' (e.g. Mark 1:1) and when early Christians worshipped him as God they distinguished him in this way.
- ◆ At **Pentecost**, the early **disciples** received the Holy Spirit, sent by Jesus who descended on them like flames (Acts 2). The Holy Spirit is thought to be a distinct person.

The Father

God the Father is believed to be the creator of the world, and to have sent Jesus into the world. He is significant because he decided to create humanity and also because Christians believe they would not be here, and would not have a hope of heaven, if he were not powerful, and the God who was in contact with the Jewish people in the Old Testament. He is perfect, and an example for Christians.

'In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was dark and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.' (Genesis 1:1–2 NRSV)

'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.' (Matthew 5:48 NRSV)

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The Son

Jesus is believed to be the Son of God (and the same as God). He is believed to have been involved in Creation, and to have come to Earth to save humanity. He is significant for Christians to believe that it is through him that they have been saved and can have a relationship with God in heaven after death.

‘Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ (Matthew 16:16)

The Spirit

The Holy Spirit is often seen to be the Person of God who communicates with humans. He has spoken through **prophets**, and, as promised by Jesus, was sent to the world (this event is known and celebrated as **Pentecost**) so that God would be present with all people. Christians say that he lives in their hearts. He is significant to Christians as he helps them and they can continually experience.

‘Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability.’ (Acts 2:3–4 NRSV)

Activity

Find a Bible quote (not one given) which refers to one or more of the Persons of the Trinity.
Hint: try one of the Gospels, or Paul’s letters.

All the Persons – Together

One good example in the Bible where all the different Persons of God are present is at Jesus’ baptism (see Matthew 3:13–17). Jesus begins his **ministry** by being baptised, and God’s approval of Jesus as the Son of God as the Holy Spirit descends to be with Jesus.

‘And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and resting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.’ (Matthew 3:16–17 NRSV)

Authority Structure

Some Christians believe that there is an authority structure within the Trinity. Some believe that the Father is the most powerful, followed by the Son and Spirit (and some also believe that the Son has power over the Spirit).

Passages such as Philippians 2:5–8 can be interpreted in different ways in the Trinity. The passage describes Jesus as equal with God (the Father), however, it also shows Jesus as being obedient to God – which could be taken to imply that the Father is in charge of the Son.

‘Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.’ (Philippians 2:5–8 NRSV)

There are also verses where Jesus talks about asking the Father to send, or to help, the Holy Spirit. These could be interpreted to mean that the Father (and Son) have authority over the Spirit.

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‘And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.’ (John 14:16–17 NRSV)

‘And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in Jerusalem, clothed with power from on high.’ (Luke 24:49 NRSV)

Issues Related to the Nature of God and Different Attitudes to God as Trinity

The **Trinity** raises issues for the nature of God – can three persons be God? or really three persons?

The Trinity as Expressed in the Apostles’ Creed

The Apostles’ **Creed** is an early church creed which is attributed to some of the Apostles (this may be myth). It appears to have existed since at least the fourth century, though the version used today was written several hundred years later. It gives us a summary of God the Father, about Jesus his Son, and about the Holy Spirit. However, it does not explicitly state that Jesus is **divine**. This raises questions about whether early Christians, such as the Apostles, believed that Jesus was God.

The Trinity as Expressed in the Nicene Creed

Because Christians in the early Church were not sure exactly how to describe the Trinity, there were different opinions. One priest called Arius, for example, did not think that Jesus was God. However, a bishop called Athanasius argued that he was. Different people and groups had varying ideas. The Emperor Constantine was fed up with the disputes and called a Church council (a meeting of Christian figures of authority) in 325 CE to decide the matter – this was the first Council of Nicaea (named after the place where it was held). The Nicene Creed was not actually completed until the first Council of Constantinople in 381 CE, but by then it was decided that God was one substance, one being, but that he contained three different Persons – this granted Jesus full divine status. Many Christians accept these teachings today and believe that Jesus was fully God and fully human – this will be dealt with further in the section on *Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension*.

The Creed mainly contains what Christians believe about the three Persons of the Trinity, as well as some statements about Jesus’ life, and other Christian beliefs about the Church and life after death.¹ You will be familiar with some of these from the section above.

About God (and his nature), the Nicene Creed states that:

- ◆ God is one.
- ◆ God the Father made the world and everything else.
- ◆ Jesus is also God, and everything was created by him / with his help, as
- ◆ Jesus came to Earth as a human, born of the Holy Spirit and his mother Mary.
- ◆ Jesus died, rose, and **ascended** to heaven.
- ◆ Jesus will come at the end of time to judge humanity (those alive and those who have died).
- ◆ The Holy Spirit gives life and has influenced **prophets**.

¹ <http://anglicansonline.org/basics/nicene.html>

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The Emperor Charlemagne, alive in the eighth and ninth centuries, made an addition to the Nicene Creed, based on **theology** from St Augustine. Previously, the Creed had claimed that the Holy Spirit 'proceeds from the Father', but this was changed to 'the Father and the Son'. The Orthodox Church disagreed with this alteration, because they saw no reason for it, and this is one of the reasons for their split from the Catholic Church.

St. Augustine
theology
and fifth century
the middle
and wrote
were very important
doctrine
Christian

The Creed says different things about the different Persons of the Trinity, but all agree that there is one God. The Creed shows that the Trinity has been an important aspect of Christianity. The Significance of the Trinity, and the way the Trinity is expressed in the Nicene Creed.

- ♦ Christians believe that God wanted to save them, and that his plan has been fulfilled (indicated by the belief that Jesus has existed since creation and that the Old Testament prophets, including foretelling Jesus).
- ♦ Christians see the different Persons of God in different ways – they perceive the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as distinct, yet united in one God.

The Oneness of God

As stated above, Christians believe in one God, not three gods. So God's name is singular. However, believing in the Trinity raises issues for this. The **Old Testament** speaks of one God, and believing that he is three persons seems to go against this. Other religions, such as Judaism and Islam believe in one God and reject the idea of any different persons. Christians who worship the Trinity have faced accusations of **idolatry** – worshipping multiple gods – and going against the **Ten Commandments**. It can be seen that belief in the Trinity is not in line with the teachings of the Bible.

'Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.' (Deuteronomy 6:4 NRSV)

However, Christians argue that they *do* believe in one God, and that this is in line with the Old Testament – they may argue that the Trinity is a mystery, and while it may be difficult to understand, one being in three persons, Christians accept this on **faith** – anything is possible. There are references in the Old Testament which can be taken to imply that there is more than one person in God. There are also references to God's Spirit (e.g. in Genesis 1), so belief in the Trinity has support from Old Testament passages.

'Then God said, "Let us make humankind in **our** image, according to **our** likeness..." (Genesis 1:26 NRSV)

'Then the LORD God said, "See, the man has become like one of **us**, knowing good and evil..." (Genesis 3:22 NRSV)

Those Christians who do not believe in the Trinity, Jews, and scholars have offered alternative reasons for such passages. It could be that God is speaking to himself in a plural way (like using the royal 'we'); or that the passages were written by those who wrote them – that there were multiple gods. Jews would also argue that the Holy Spirit etc. do not refer to a different person of God, in the same way that if you say 'I' you would not be referring to another person.

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Unitarian Christians, such as Christadelphians, do not accept belief in the Tri person that mainstream Christians would refer to as the Father). They believe Spirit are not references to a different person, but to the same God. They believe Jesus saved humanity, but that he was human. However, as Jesus did not **sin**, he was

Christadelphians have a reasonable basis for interpreting from the Bible that Jesus was actually God. Other than John 1 (which was arguably added to John's Gospel by later authors), the **Gospels** do not refer to Jesus as God/divine, but as God's Son or Messiah. There are also occasions where Jesus seems to separate himself from God's (the Father's) knowledge, or appears to lack God's power. Many Christians believe that the human body gave him limitations / Jesus chose to limit his power / God the Father / God the Son / God the father may even have knowledge which God the Son does not. The Bible is open to interpretation in this way.

'Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven."' (Matthew 16:16-17 NRSV)

'Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone."

"But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." (Matthew 24:36 NRSV)

'Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honour, except in their own towns, in their own kin, and in their own house." And he could do no deed of power there, so that he would only lay his hands on a few sick people and cured them.' (Mark 6:4-5 NRSV)

While the Trinity does raise some issues for belief in God as one, it also has provided a way for humans to experience God. If Jesus was truly God, then humans have experienced God and his nature directly, and not just through the Father. This gives Christians confidence that they know God, as they can experience him directly.

Transcendence and Immanence

As seen in the section on the *Nature of God*, belief in the Trinity can actually be seen as a way of understanding God being both **transcendent** and **immanent** – if different persons of the Trinity have different characteristics.

Influence Today

- ◆ Most Christians believe in the **Trinity**.
- ◆ Some Churches use **creeds**, such as the Nicene Creed, which express their beliefs about the Trinity, in worship.
- ◆ Christians celebrate Trinity Sunday, the birth of Jesus at Christmas, his death and **resurrection** at Easter, and the coming of the Holy Spirit at **Pentecost**.
- ◆ Christians **pray** to Jesus as well as God the Father, and may pray to God the Father 'in Jesus' name'.
- ◆ Blessings can be, and **baptisms** are, given 'in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit'.
- ◆ Christians may feel that they experience the Holy Spirit acting in their lives, and Pentecostal Christians put particular importance on the role of the Holy Spirit.

Quick Questions

- 3) Give three Christian beliefs about the Trinity.

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Biblical Accounts of Creation

Christianity, like many religions and world views, has a **Creation** story to explain the world; the creation of the universe and humanity. Christians believe that God entrusted it to humans. There are several different interpretations of the Creation story, but everyone believes the same thing about it.

Keywords:

- ♦ **Creation** – the account of how the world and universe were made
- ♦ **doctrine** – set teaching or belief
- ♦ **dominion** – control over something
- ♦ **fundamentalist** – in Christianity, someone who holds that certain beliefs are true, the Bible is true, and literally believes in events such as Jesus' miracles
- ♦ **grace** – what God grants to humans, which saves them
- ♦ **literal** – something exact and factual
- ♦ **metaphorical** – something which is symbolic
- ♦ **original sin** – sin all humans inherit because of the Fall
- ♦ **personal sin** – sins committed by an individual
- ♦ **pre-existence** – to exist/be before something, for example before being born before Creation
- ♦ **reason** – a rational capacity for understanding and making decisions
- ♦ **stewardship** – a state of managing resources in a responsible way
- ♦ **symbolic** – something which represents something else
- ♦ **Word of God** – Jesus; through which God's power is expressed, and his teaching

Synopsis of Biblical Accounts of Creation, Including the Role of the Creator

The first book of the Bible, Genesis, gives two different accounts of **Creation**. The creator is also affirmed in **creeds** such as the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed.

Taking it further...

Why don't you read Genesis 1–3 and John 1:1–18 to get a better idea of the Creation story?

Genesis 1 and the start of Genesis 2:

Before the creation of the world, there was nothing. But God's Spirit moved over the water, and light began to come into being. This shows that the Spirit was present at Creation from the very first part. Over a period of six days God created light; the water and the sky; land and stars; fish and birds; animals and humans – in God's image. God gives rest to his creation, and after, is pleased with his creation and rests on the seventh day.

'In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was without form and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God (Or: which) swept over the face of the waters.' (Genesis 1:1–2 NRSV)

'Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.' (Genesis 1:3 NRSV)

'So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.' (Genesis 1:27 NRSV)

Genesis 2:

This differs to Genesis 1. There is more detail, and some things even happen before animals in this account. Furthermore, the creation of woman is different; she is created after the animals, out of one of man's ribs. Man is commanded not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

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Genesis 3:

The serpent tempts the woman to eat the forbidden fruit. She protests that she should not eat, and shares it with the man. They lose some sense of innocence, which is why they are naked and hiding from God. God discovers that they have eaten the fruit and casts them out of the Garden of Eden.

Note: Christianity shares the Creation account given in Genesis with Judaism, and everything in the same way as Christians.

John 1: 1–18:

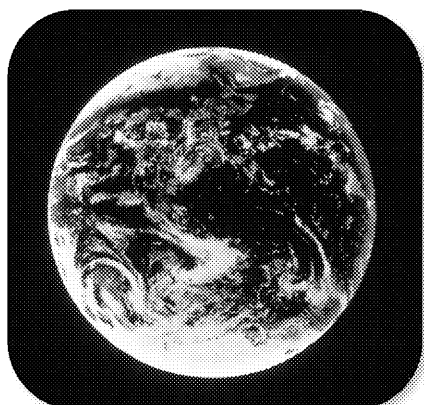
God's **Word** is with God at Creation, and God creates through him. It then becomes flesh and is recognised, but grants humans God's **grace**. This passage supports Christianity by showing that God was embodied in the person of Jesus – that God the Son pre-existed Jesus and Jesus was God. It claims that the Word, Jesus, was present at Creation, so existed before the beginning. This is important in Creation at different levels – he helped to create the physical world and the new beginning for humans who want a relationship with God. Jesus is God because he brought God's teaching (his word) to Earth – this is significant because if God came from God, then it should be followed.

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, like the glory of the father's only son, full of grace and truth.' (John 1:1–3, 14 NRSV)

The accounts mention God (the Father), the Word (Jesus) and the Holy Spirit, which is the **Trinity** in the Bible.

Some main points from these narratives which you should know for the exam:

- ◆ God the Father is the Creator. He creates everything, and without him nothing can be created.
- ◆ God the Spirit is the agent of God at creation.
- ◆ The Word of God is God.
- ◆ The Word was present before creation.
- ◆ The Word played a part in creation – the world was created through him.
- ◆ Jesus is the Word. Therefore the person of Jesus **pre-existed** his life on Earth.



The world, which Christians believe was created by God.

Issues Raised in Genesis for Different Literal Interpretations and Metaphors

Different Christians interpret the Creation account differently. These views are not necessarily grouped together. Different Catholics have different views, and different Protestants have different views.

- ◆ Some believe that it is **literally** true that the world was created within seven days, and that the first people were called Adam and Eve. Christians who believe this literally are often called **fundamentalists**. The term 'fundamentalist' originated to describe people who held that certain beliefs, e.g. that the Bible was literally true (or necessary, for Christianity).

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- Some believe that the Creation story is **metaphorical**; that God may be seen as starting the process of evolution, and that the Bible is not necessarily true. Note: this does *not* mean that they see the Bible as untrue, but rather that it is a metaphor.

Important! A literal interpretation of Genesis raises the issue that it may make Christians to trust scientific findings which suggest that the world developed over a long period, and that humans evolved.

However, it may also make Christians feel special, as humans are, on this interpretation, beings made in God's image, not evolved from a common ancestor with monkeys. The account of Creation can also place emphasis on God's power – if he was able to create the world in seven days, he can do anything. Interestingly, literal interpretations are more of a modern phenomenon (they were not popular two centuries ago and becoming popular around 100 years ago), rather than a traditional one.

A more **metaphorical** understanding will not conflict with Christians learning about different interpretations of the world, and may help in reconciling their religious and scientific beliefs. They believe that God created everything, but through scientific methods.

Important! Understanding the story of creation metaphorically raises the issue that Christians have to justify why they believe some parts of the Bible literally (such as God sending Jesus), and not others. Unless they can do this well, they run the risk of undermining the authority of the Bible.

Both those who take the creation account literally and metaphorically believe in God's power in creating the universe in the world around them.

'Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible and unseen, have been understood and seen through the things he has made.' (Romans 1:20 NIV)

The Fall in the Genesis Narrative

One interpretation of creation leads to the **doctrine** of the **Fall**; largely associated with St. Augustine. This expresses that it was through humans taking and eating the forbidden fruit that they lost their **grace** (see Genesis 3). Humans cannot redeem themselves from this, and need God's help.

The **doctrine** of the **Fall** has varied impact. Augustine felt that fallenness as a result of Adam and Eve were passed on through sex – this is called **original sin**. This idea they may view sex negatively, and women may be seen as inferior to men because of Adam. Some Christians feel a greater need for a **saviour**, Jesus, because of this.

Christians who do not agree with St. Augustine are less likely to see sex or women negatively. For example, many see women as equal to men because Genesis 1:27 says that both men and women were created in the image of God. While such Christians feel they need God to save them, they may be more positive about the human condition – St. Thomas Aquinas thought humans still had their **reason** as a moral compass. Some Christians only believe in **personal sin**; disobedience committed individually, so do not feel the added weight of original sin. Some

St. Aquinas thought that the three virtues of prudence, justice, and fortitude were the basis for the moral life.

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Christians view the Creation story positively; if humans were once so close to God, they can draw closer to him again if Christians try to follow his teachings and try not to sin.

The doctrine of the Fall is emphasised in the Catholic Church and older branches of Christianity such as Calvinism and Lutheranism, and is less accepted in many modern Protestant churches.

Role and Purpose of Human Beings

Creation is important for many Christians because they believe that God gave humans the right to rule the world, or have **dominion** over it.

'God blessed them, and God said to them, "...subdue [the Earth]; and have dominion over the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the Earth." God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of the Earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food."' (Genesis 1:28 NRSV)

Some Christians believe this means that the world is theirs, to exploit for their own benefit, whatever they want, and control animals.

However, many Christians believe that dominion also comes with great responsibility. God has made them **stewards** of his creation; people who manage it and protect it. This concept of stewardship reminds them that the world is God's and they should care for it.

'Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries.' (1 Corinthians 4:1)

In Genesis 1:28, God also commands humanity to reproduce. Many Christians, including Catholics, Anglicans, and other Protestant denominations such as Methodists, believe this is an important command, but do not believe that all couples need to have children, let alone many children, as more of a command to the human race in general, or as a gift – God is all-powerful and can create life on Earth. However, the Catholic Church places great emphasis on this verse. It teaches that all couples should try to have children (if they are physically able to conceive) and that it is wrong to be open to the possibility of new life, so that people are not stopping themselves from having children. God wants this for them.

'God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the Earth." (Genesis 1:28 NRSV)

Quick Questions

- 4) Give **three** purposes of humanity as believed by Christians.
- 5) Outline how creation may be understood metaphorically.

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The Problem of Evil and Suffering and Righteous God

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Keywords:

- ♦ **baptism** – a sacrament which involves being anointed with, or immersed in, water in Jesus
- ♦ **evil** – often refers to moral badness and choosing to do the 'wrong' thing, but can also refer to natural evil which cause suffering
- ♦ **moral evil** – something caused by a human being's wilful action, like murder
- ♦ **natural evil** – something caused by events in the world, like a tsunami, or disease
- ♦ **predestination** – the idea that God has chosen who will be saved in advance
- ♦ **righteous** – good, fair and just
- ♦ **suffering** – experiencing pain

Concept of Good

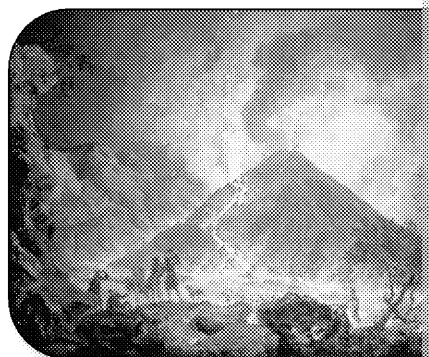
Good as a concept is so universally understood, that it is hard to define. It is something that is good and/or desired. It may refer to a preferable version of something e.g. good (for some reason) than bad ones. Good may be seen as the opposite of **evil**. For many people, good is often associated with God and God's will. Genesis 1 talks about God creating the world, so not only is God good, but what he makes is also good. Christians will struggle with the problem of evil being created in God's image, by following God.

'God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.' (Genesis 1:31)

Concept of Evil – Types and Causes

Evil is generally considered to be that which is bad and/or wrong. There are many different views about evil. Some people see it as a force which opposes good, while others see it as a lack of good. Often when people speak about evil, they will be talking about an action which someone has done or a thought which someone had. However, sometimes 'evil' can refer to something which has had bad consequences.

Natural evil is something, e.g. a natural event which is not the fault of any human, which causes **suffering** (pain), such as a natural disaster or disease. Examples include tsunamis, volcanoes, earthquakes, HIV/AIDS and cancer. Causes include natural changes in the environment, genetics and organisms such as viruses.



Erupting volcanoes can cause natural evil.

Moral evil is something which a human being chooses to do, which causes suffering. Examples include killing someone, theft and exploitation of others. The cause of moral evil is the choice of a human being to choose to act evilly. They may do this due to any number of reasons, such as greed, jealousy or anger.

It is important to separate these two types of evil for discussing the problem of evil and its solutions to it.

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The Problem of the Existence of Evil and Suffering

As seen in the section on the *Nature of God*, Christians believe that God is that he is all-powerful, or **omnipotent**. This is particularly shown in his **creation** and **salvation** of humanity. Someone who is all-powerful can, theoretically, do

'For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome,
(Deuteronomy 10:17 NRSV)

Christians also believe that God is loving, or **benevolent**, and many believe that God is omnibenevolent. He protected and guided the Jewish people in the **Old Testament** to save humanity from **sin**.

'God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world to live through him.' (1 John 4:9 NRSV)

Christians also think that God is **righteous**; that he is fair, **just** and good. They trust in him when he has promised to care for them – a fair God will keep his promise. They believe that he is fair in rewarding the good and punishing the bad.

'The LORD works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed. He made his acts to the people of Israel. The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.' (Psalm 103:6–8 NRSV)

The problem of **evil** and **suffering** is one issue which has faced Christians and is often posed as a question:

'If God is omnipotent, benevolent and righteous, then why does he allow evil and suffering?

If he is omnipotent, then he could stop evil and suffering. Human concepts of love imply that someone who loves someone else does not want any harm to come to that person. If God is loving, he should not want humans to come to harm. If God is righteous, he should not allow good people to suffer.

The fact that there is evil and suffering in the world raises questions about God:

- ◆ Can he stop evil and suffering?
- ◆ Does he care that humans suffer?
- ◆ Has he unfairly abandoned humans?
- ◆ Or is there some other explanation that allows there to be an omnipotent, benevolent and righteous God, while there is evil and suffering in the world?

How the Problem May Cause Believers to Question Their Faith or the Existence of God

- ◆ If God *is* omnipotent, benevolent and righteous, it does not make sense that he would allow suffering, or allow the innocent to suffer when the wicked often succeed.
- ◆ If God *is not* omnipotent, benevolent and righteous, this seems to undermine the basis of Christianity, because its portrayal of God is (in their opinion) not accurate, and therefore not a Christian faith.

Some believers wonder why they should trust in a God who allows bad things to happen, so they question their **faith** and whether they should keep believing. Some people have left Christianity, because its portrayal of God is (in their opinion) not accurate, and therefore not a Christian faith.

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Some believers question whether they should believe in the existence of God. If God *would* be omnipotent, benevolent and righteous, but clearly *is not* – so

Explanations and Solutions Offered to the Problem of the Existence of Evil

Christians explain the existence of **evil** and **suffering** in many different ways.

The Fall of (Hu)mankind as the Result of Free Will and the Concept of Evil

Because Genesis 1 teaches that when God made the world, everything was good, at this point, there was no evil in the world. However, most Christians do accept that there is evil in the world now.

Taking it further...

Read Genesis 3:1–19 to help to understand ideas of the Fall and the origin of evil.

If evil is taken to be anything which opposes God, many feel that the first in the world was evil. The first humans disobeyed God and ate fruit which was forbidden to them. In *Biblical Accounts of Creation*, some Christians, such as St Augustine, believe that evil was created by God.

Regardless of whether Christians agree with the extent to which other humans are affected by Adam and Eve's actions, this does provide an example of **moral evil**, and shows an explanation for it. Adam and Eve have **free will** – this means that they can choose to disobey God and do evil. If all humans have this ability, then this is why moral evil exists.

'The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.'" ... when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.'

(Genesis 3:2–3, 6 NRSV)

Some Christians argue that it is more **benevolent** for God to have allowed humans to make their own decisions and to have free will – otherwise humans would merely be puppets. If God made humans be living. In order to have genuine choice, the consequence is that some people will choose to do things which hurt others. This is one explanation for why a loving God allows evil.

Pause for thought:

You can see whether you accept the free will solution by asking yourself whether you would prefer to be offered the ability to plug into a miraculous machine and experience a virtual life of happiness. But none of your 'friends' in the machine would be real and none of the things you experience would be real either. Or, you could remain in real life, with struggles and hardships, but you would be able to make your own choices, work hard for your own goals, and trust your friends. Many people find the virtual life more appealing. They are convinced they would not want to live a 'fake' life. (This scenario is based on the 'Experience Machine', created by the philosopher Robert Nozick.)

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Christians who do accept the doctrine of the Fall also accept the concept of Adam and Eve sinned, this changed the nature of humanity. This fallenness of sex, and is part of the human condition, so all humans have original sin. The separation of humans from God leads to **moral evil**. This explains why humans *want* to do evil as their nature is damaged, and they are no longer perfectly reflecting God's image.

Original sin can also be thought to have led to God instituting **natural evil**. Because that humans have sinned he curses them – he condemns woman to pain of childbirth that he would have to work hard for food. It can also be interpreted that the (often natural) evil of death:

'To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children..." And to the man he said, "...cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it the days of your life... By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the dust, for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.'" (Genesis 3:16-19)

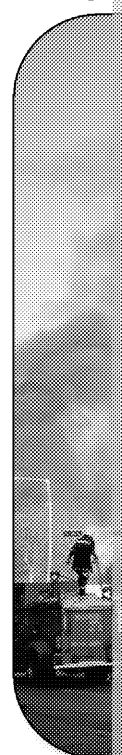
As seen above, the Catholic Church promotes belief in original sin more than other Christians. The reason that the Catholic Church promotes infant **baptism** is the belief that it cleanses them of their original sin.

Note: In Genesis woman/Eve is tempted to eat the forbidden fruit by the serpent, often associated with Satan/the Devil. Therefore, some Christians might argue that the Devil is evil because he tempted humans.

Furthermore, the tree from which Adam and Eve ate the fruit is referred to as 'the tree of good and evil' (Genesis 2:17 NRSV), and this has different interpretations. Did Adam and Eve would know the difference between good and evil which is the tree of good and evil? Did God punish them with knowledge of good and evil for disobeying? Did God influence the start of evil so that there would be both good and evil to experience?

Other Solutions to the Problem of the Existence of Evil and Suffering

- ♦ Most Christians would not deny that God is loving but *some Christians deny that God is **omnipotent***. Maybe there are limits to his power. Some believe that he chooses to limit his power. Others say that there are things which are not possible, however powerful you are. Sometimes people ask if it is possible for an all-powerful being to create something so heavy that they could not lift it, or to create a being more intelligent than themselves. These are paradoxes – it is impossible to find a satisfactory solution. This could theoretically go for the world too – it might be impossible to have created a planet which supported life which did not have bacteria and viruses which cause illness, and which did not have earthquakes and volcanoes which cause destruction.
 - Most Christians do not accept that this is the case.
- ♦ *God is being **just** in allowing evil and suffering, as humans deserve punishment for their **sins***, and are already lucky that Jesus died to bring them eternal life.
 - However, the innocent do seem to suffer, sometimes more than evil people, so this does not seem just.



Does God exist?

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'You rebuke the insolent, accursed ones, who wander from your commandments; but you dealt well with your servant, O LORD, according to your word.' (Psalm 119:21)

- ◆ Another reason for evil and suffering explored in the **Book of Job** is that the Book of Job is viewed by many Christians as a poetical exploration of suffering. It tells the story of a man called Job who had many good things and worshipped God. Satan wanted to cause bad things to happen to Job to see if Job will still worship God. It was a test of a good person, but he had never been tested; the real test was to see if he was still faithful after bad things had happened to him.
- ◆ The Book of Job also explores the idea that evil and suffering are a *test of faith*. It is possible that without obstacles in a Christian's life they would not see any reason to doubt God's existence. The Book of Job shows that Job had a much better understanding of God after his trials. They made him think and really consider his relationship with God. Through his suffering Job never lost faith in God, but he could have – having a relationship with God after experiencing suffering shows that faith is more genuine.

There is a difference between having high faith and vice versa. If there is less faith, there is less need for God. If there is more faith, there is more need for God.

(Some Christians feel that they should **pray** to God to reduce evil and suffering. Prayer has resulted in God stepping in to end or reduce a particular instance of evil. This teaches Christians to ask God to protect them from evil, and without evil's existence, it is not possible – allowing evil encourages such prayer, and also concern for others and the world.)

'And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one [or from temptation] (Matthew 6:13 NRSV)

- ◆ Some Christians say that God should not be doubted, and that *the problem is our understanding*. The Book of Job indicates that God's reasons are beyond our understanding.

[God to Job] "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding." (Job 38:4 NRSV)

- ◆ However, many people argue that there must be better ways of testing character. Being able to understand God is not a satisfactory solution.

Some people are not able to accept that God is right to allow evil and suffering and for them the solutions are not successful. They may lose faith, or never believe in God.

For others, these solutions do solve the problem of evil and suffering and are satisfactory. If there are reasons for evil/suffering, God cannot do everything, and/or free will with evil is necessary.

Quick Questions

- 6) Describe **one** solution to the problem of evil and suffering.

Now Try This...

- 7) Explain the importance of the problem of evil and suffering within Christianity.

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Jesus Christ

Keywords:

- ♦ **adultery** – sex where at least one of the participants is married to someone they are having sex with
- ♦ **agape** – unconditional love, God's love, love which Christians should have for others
- ♦ **blasphemy** – saying or doing something insulting to God
- ♦ **Christ** – the Greek word for Messiah
- ♦ **divorce** – the legal ending of a marriage
- ♦ **fast** – to go without sustenance, or without luxurious types of food
- ♦ **Lord** – a title given to someone in authority. Used by Christians to show Jesus was referred to as 'Lord'
- ♦ **Messiah** – this is Hebrew for 'anointed one', and in Christian use signifies the one sent by God to save humanity from sin
- ♦ **oath** – a type of promise about something someone will do. Often this involves swearing on something someone
- ♦ **profane** – to mistreat, especially that which is religious
- ♦ **reconciliation** – being reunited in a positive sense with someone one was separated from
- ♦ **retaliation** – taking revenge against someone for something they have done to you, similar to the harm they inflicted
- ♦ **saviour** – someone who saves – Christians see Jesus as a spiritual saviour
- ♦ **Son of God** – this term is used to indicate Jesus' unique relationship with God
- ♦ **Temple** – the Jewish holy building in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus, which was destroyed in 70 AD
- ♦ **Transfiguration** – when Jesus was transformed, and began to shine, in front of his disciples on Mount Tabor, from heaven, and Moses and Elijah appeared

Meaning of Terms: Messiah, Son of God, Lord and Saviour and Significance and Relevance for Christians of these as Descriptions of Jesus

The **Messiah** is a Jewish idea, and is not a new idea within Christianity. Following **Old Testament prophecy**, the Jews believed that God would send them a Messiah (anointed one) to save them (many still believe this today). At the time of Jesus, there had not been a prophet important enough to be recorded in the Jewish Scriptures for decades, and possibly centuries, depending on when the last Old Testament prophets are believed to have lived.

Beliefs among the Jews about the Messiah included that he would bring the political liberation, and that he would be descended from King David, an important king in Jewish history, whose life is recorded in the Jewish Scriptures (and the Old Testament). They seemed to believe that the Messiah would come to rule over them, as the Jewish judges and kings had in the past, before they had been forced to submit to foreign rule, by those such as the Babylonian Empire and, at the time of Jesus, the Roman Empire. Prophecy which has been used by the Jews, now and at the time of Jesus, to predict such a Messiah comes mainly from the book of Isaiah, but books such as other prophetic books and the Psalms have also been seen to contain some sections of relevance.

King David's life is recorded in the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament found in the Bible is the source of the Jewish people's beliefs.

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‘He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples’ (Isaiah 42:1 NRSV) (taken by Jews to mean that the Messiah will rule on earth, as a political leader)

‘... then I will establish your royal throne, as I made covenant with your father, and your house will never lack a successor to rule over Israel.’” (2 Chronicles 7:18 NRSV) (taken by Jews to mean that the Messiah would be a future Jewish leader, the Messiah, from David’s line)

Do you think the Messiah is a political leader or a spiritual one?

The **Gospels** present Jesus as a very different Messiah (or **Christ**) from the one which the Jews were expecting. The term Messiah is used to show that Jesus is the fulfilment of these Old Testament predictions, and that he has been sent by God to save humanity. However, the gospels portray Jesus as not a political **saviour**, but a spiritual one.

Christians believe that Jesus came to save them from their **sins**, rather than from political oppression.

‘She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from all their sins.’ (Matthew 1:21 NRSV)

‘For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.’ (Luke 19:10 NRSV)

The Jesus of Mark’s Gospel also appears to question whether the Messiah is a political leader (Mark 12), by quoting scripture which suggests that David refers to the Messiah, but surely not refer to his ‘son’ in this way (Mark 12:36 NRSV). This could be taken to mean that Jesus does not believe himself to be, descended from David, though many Jews did, and which Matthew and Luke sought to prove in their Gospels, by tracing Jesus’ lineage back to David. The passage may also be taken to emphasise that regardless of who Jesus is, he is more important than just a son of David, as he is the **Son of God**.

Jesus being referred to as ‘Lord’ shows him to be important, recognised by his followers as a leader and significant figure. With reference to the passage about King David (Mark 12), it also potentially indicates that Jesus is more important than other leaders of the Old Testament. The Apostles’ **Creed** and the Nicene Creed refer to Jesus as ‘Lord’.

In Mark’s Gospel, Jesus admits to being the Messiah when questioned by the high priest (Mark 14). He follows this up by saying that he will be seated at God’s right hand. Mark is deliberate in his contrast between this, and the next use of Messiah when Jesus is mocked on the cross, suggesting that if Jesus were the Messiah, he could not be mocked. Mark’s Jesus presents his Messiahship as being out of this world, claiming to be the Son of God, whereas the priests seem to assume that the Messiah’s power would be derived from earthly authority, and that no earthly authority, such as the Romans, would be able to do him harm.

‘He asked them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.”’ (Mark 8:29 NRSV)

‘Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?”’ (Mark 14:61–62 NRSV)

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There are many references in the Gospels to Jesus as the Son of God, for example his son at Jesus' **baptism**, and the **Transfiguration**.

'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased.' (Matthew 3:16-17)

'This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!' (Mark 9:7)

Others also referred to him as the Son of God in the **New Testament**:

'Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."' (Matthew 16:16)

'God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord' (1 Corinthians 1:9 NRSV)

Within Mark's Gospel, Jesus is only referred to as 'Son of God' three times (Mark 1:1, 1:11, 1:3). In the opening sentence of Mark's Gospel, where Mark proclaims his belief that Jesus is the Son of God, Jesus is referred to as Son of God by demons and unclean spirits, as though the spirits knew Jesus' true identity, and that until his death and **resurrection**, Jesus portrayed himself as the Son of God. It would be after his resurrection, and after his suffering (see above), that his true identity was fully revealed.

The Roman Centurion at Jesus' death also refers to him as 'God's Son', showing that Jesus' true identity, and the **salvation** he brought humanity, was available for everyone.

'The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.' (Mark 1:1)

'Whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted, "You are God!" But he sternly ordered them not to make him known.' (Mark 3:11-12)

'Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he bore witness, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"' (Mark 15:39 NRSV)

At the time of Jesus, equating someone with God or claiming God's power was considered blasphemy. So for first century Jews, claiming that Jesus was God's Son could be considered blasphemy. The book of Acts (after the gospels in the New Testament) indicates that first century Jews were responsible for killing Christians because they disagreed with the status that Jesus was given.

On the other hand, some scholars have argued that first century Jews like Simeon (who was himself Jewish, though he followed Jesus), did not believe that referring to Jesus as God's Son actually meant that Jesus *was* God. In the Old Testament, the Jewish people were considered the children of God, and so referring to someone as God's Son could be seen as referring to someone who was nonetheless a human.

Activity

Use an online Bible to search for instances in the Gospels where Jesus is referred to as the Son of God – you should be able to search for the terms in the search bar.

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From Mark's Gospel, it is hard to know what Jesus thought about being the Son of God as he never refers to himself this way. However, when he rebukes demons for addressing him this way, Mark implies that he does so to keep his identity secret, rather than because they were wrong. Jesus clearly thought he had a special relationship with God; whether he thought he was divine is hard to tell.

It is significant for many Christians that they feel Jesus was aware of fulfilling Old Testament prophecy; that he was the Messiah who God intended to send. Many Christians see additional prophecies in the Old Testament as referring to the coming of Jesus as the Messiah; prophecies which Jews (now and then) do/did not regard as concerning the Messiah. Some of these are reflected in the Gospels, for example Psalm 22 on the cross, calling out to God. This indicates to Christians today Jesus' role, and this is significant because if he was not aware he was the Messiah, he would need to play, this would shed doubt on the widespread Christian belief. It is significant because it shows that Jesus felt that the role of Messiah was messianic, not political, and this reminds Christians that it is more important for them to be spiritually liberated.

Many twenty first century Christians believe that references to Jesus as the Son of God in the New Testament, and references to the miraculous things he did, mean that he was significant because, if true, it means that God cared enough about humans to die for them himself. It also means that God can relate to how humans feel, and this is significant for how they view Jesus, and how they view God.

Apart from showing Jesus' status as an important person and a leader, 'Lord' describes Jesus for Christians, as the word 'LORD' in capitals in the Bible stands for God. Calling Jesus 'Lord' reminds Christians of Jesus' relationship with God.

'... the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrims the breath of life...' (Genesis 2:7 NRSV)

Jesus being a saviour is significant to Christians, because they believe that he saved them from their sins, and allowed them to have a relationship with God. As well as meaning salvation from death, and that they will be forgiven wrongdoing, salvation through Jesus is significant because many believe that they no longer need to follow the Jewish **law**. They believe that Jesus took the place of this law, and hope that he will save them, but they do not expect God to send them a political saviour.

These titles as descriptions of Jesus are relevant to Christians today because

- ◆ They believe that Jesus came to save them spiritually, and this forms the basis of their faith.
- ◆ They do not expect God to send them a political saviour.



Matthias Stom's portrayal of Caiaphas, c. 1630 – in the National Gallery, London

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- ♦ Many believe that Jesus is God – God’s Son, one of the members of the Trinity and **pray** to him.
- ♦ They believe that Jesus is someone to look up to, follow and obey.
- ♦ They believe that they do not need to follow all of the laws in the Old Testament, but are saved through Jesus rather than the law.

Role and Importance of Jesus’ Teachings and Life as an Example for Christians

Jesus’ teachings and example are important for Christians, as they show Christians how to live.

Probably the most important teaching and example of Jesus was to show Christians how to love God and help them. Jesus taught that loving God and loving others was the most important thing. Jesus taught that these were the two greatest commandments. Christians, therefore, worship God and putting others first in their lives.

“‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’” He said to him, “‘Love your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind and strength. This is the first and greatest commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as you love yourself.’ These two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 22:36–39 NIV)

Some Christians interpret this passage as meaning that if they love God and love others, they do not need to follow any other laws – all laws which God gave had this purpose. If you love God in this loving manner, then you do not need to follow specific rules. Others believe that laws should be followed, Jesus is just saying that this is the reasoning behind laws, but laws are still relevant. While the vast majority of Christians do not observe all biblical laws, those most likely to observe the biblical laws in the Old Testament are the Catholic and **evangelical** and fundamentalist Christians.

As well as teaching people to love others, Jesus showed that this love should not necessarily just those who people would think to help. In the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) Jesus tells of a man who is beaten and left to die by robbers. A priest and a Levite would have worked in the Temple ignore the man, but a Samaritan helps him. The Samaritan pays the innkeeper to continue to care for the man. Jesus teaches that people should love their neighbour – going out of their way to help people who they do not know if they are their neighbour.

“‘Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell in the hands of robbers?’” He said, “‘The one who showed him mercy.’” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.” (Luke 10:29–37 NIV)

To add some context to the passage, priests and those who worked in the Temple followed strict purity rules – the first two men who pass the man who has been attacked and left to die, are priests. They are afraid of making themselves spiritually unclean by coming into contact with the man who has been attacked. They have then had to go through cleansing rituals, and/or avoid the Temple for a period of time. However, while in the illustration these people do not help the man, as those who help him would have been viewed highly in their communities. On the other hand, Samaritans, near to the region where Jesus lived, were not viewed kindly by the Jews. Samaritans had a religion similar to Judaism (there are still Samaritans today), but with some differences. They believe they should worship God. So Jesus showed that it was not who you were that mattered to God. He also showed that helping others was more important than following the law.

Taking it further...

Find out some more about Jewish purity laws to understand why Jesus’ teaching was so important.

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Jesus also demonstrated this belief – that showing love was more important than **law** – through his actions. He healed a man who had the skin disease leprosy. Jesus would have been forbidden from touching such a person – because it was unclean (as well as risking spreading the disease). Such actions of Jesus are showing them that loving others is more important than following purity laws. In teaching, most Christians do not follow Jewish purity laws, seeing them as less important than their actions towards others.

‘When Jesus had come down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. He came to him and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.” He took his hand and touched him, saying, “I do choose. Be made clean!” Immediately he was cured. (Matthew 8:1–3 NRSV)

Jesus’ actions of love to others are also important in prompting Christians to have faith. In Mark 5:21–42, Jesus is called to heal a man’s daughter. On the way, surrounded by a crowd, a woman with internal bleeding touches his cloak, believing this will make her well. Jesus stops to identify the woman who touched him. He tells her that she has been healed by her faith. While this is happening, messengers arrive to say that the girl Jesus was called to heal has died. However, Jesus tells them to have faith. He goes to the house where the girl was, and finds that she is just sleeping, and raises her.

‘He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” (Mark 5:34 NRSV)

‘... Do not fear, only believe.’ (Mark 5:36 NRSV)

Jesus demonstrates that he will heal/help people if asked, and that people can have faith in God if they have faith. He also encourages those without faith to believe. This is important for Christians when they begin to doubt God – or simply do not consider asking for help – to always have faith.

Some Christians believe that the girl in this passage had not died – she had slipped into a coma (‘sleeping’, as Jesus put it). However, many believe that Jesus did raise the girl from the dead.

The bleeding woman would have been an outcast within Jewish society, as her disease would probably have made her ritually unclean. This reinforces the idea that Jesus came to save everyone, including those who were ignored and rejected by others, and reminds Christians that God’s **salvation** is available for everyone. This can be particularly significant to Christians from minorities and lower classes. Some Christians today are converts from other religions, and this passage might be particularly significant for them – for example, many lower-class Hindus have converted to Christianity, because in Hinduism, different classes of people are viewed differently, and the religion is not equally accessible to all.

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Jesus' love has been described as **agape** – a Greek term often translated into love. Such teachings and examples of Jesus' love may be considered agape.

- ♦ Jesus taught that everyone should be loved, not just certain people – from society such as a man with leprosy and a woman with internal bleeding.
- ♦ Jesus taught that God cares about love more than following rules – he forgave the Samaritan and healed the man with leprosy though this made him ritually unclean.

Christians believe God loves them regardless of what they do or what sort of person they are. Jesus would always do what was best for them, regardless of the cost to himself, even death on the cross.

Christians believe that they should also show such agape to others.

'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.' (Matthew 5:43–45 NRSV)

The Christian Ideal as Expressed in Jesus' Teaching in the Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount is a section of teaching in Matthew's Gospel (chapters 5–7) which is thought to have been delivered by Jesus on a mountain (there are similarities between the Plain in Luke's Gospel).

The Beatitudes

In a section called the Beatitudes, Jesus talks about all the people who are blessed (this is linked to the word 'blessing'). Included in those who are blessed are those who are poor, those who mourn, those who are meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and those who show mercy. This makes sense, but it is interesting that these are encouraging characteristics or positions which might be thought to be 'weak' or 'undesirable'. Jesus did not necessarily conform to these expectations – he was teaching that those who experience misfortune and are persecuted by society are rewarded by God. He said nothing about the strong, or the wealthy, or the powerful. This encourages Christians to live their lives in ways pleasing to God, rather than in the way expected by society.

'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' (Matthew 5:10 NRSV)

What Jesus Commands People *not* to do

- ♦ Break religious laws or encourage others to do so. Jesus claimed that he did not come to stop people from following Jewish **laws**. This is an interesting teaching, considering that Christians do not keep all of the Jewish laws. Some Christians may choose to interpret this to mean 'important' laws, such as the **Ten Commandments**, rather than Jewish dietary and purity laws.

'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come to fulfil them.' (Matthew 5:17 NRSV)

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- ◆ Be angry at others or insult them. Jesus extended Jewish teaching – physically hurt others, but they should refrain from mentally hurting them in any way. So Christians should make sure that they are kind in all they do and not let themselves to be consumed by anger.

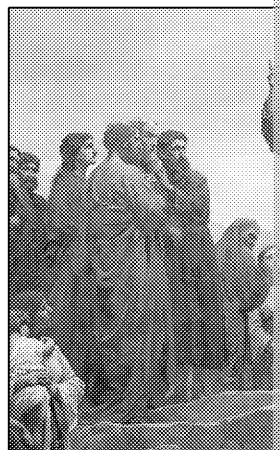
‘But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, “You rascal, you!” you are liable to the hell of fire.’ (Matthew 5:22 NRSV)

- ◆ Lust after someone (**adultery**). While in the Ten Commandments, God says not to commit adultery, Jesus teaches that even those who want to be punished by God – it is not enough to have evil thoughts and not act on them; that they need to try to control their thoughts and intentions, and that is what these.

‘You shall not commit adultery.’ (Exodus 20:14 NRSV)

‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall not commit adultery.” But I say to you that anyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.’ (Matthew 5:27–28 NRSV)

- ◆ Get **divorced**. Jesus teaches that while divorce had been permitted, this was wrong. Many Christians interpret his teaching here to mean that divorce is wrong unless your spouse has cheated on you. Jesus implies that remarriage after divorce (unless the other person has committed adultery) is adultery itself. Others may feel that Jesus does not specifically condemn divorce here, but rather remarriage after divorce (as divorcing someone and staying single is not adultery). The Catholic Church is completely against divorce (based on other teachings from Jesus), and would view this passage as part of Jesus’ teaching against remarriage, though he does not explicitly express this here.



The Sermon on the Mount

‘It was also said, “Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce, so that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”’ (Matthew 5:31–32 NRSV)

- ◆ Take oaths. Jesus told people to speak plainly, and not to swear by anything. There are many interpretations. One is that oaths should not be necessary – people should just speak the truth at all times, making oaths redundant. Another interpretation is that it is wrong to swear by something, for example, ‘by heaven’ because it is possible that you may be wrong.

‘...Do not swear at all...’ (Matthew 5:34 NRSV)

- ♦ **Retaliate.** Jesus told people that they should not hurt another person if they have been hurt first. This goes against older Jewish teaching which allowed people to seek justice for wrongs done. Some Christians argue that this older teaching was wrong because God wanted people to retaliate, but because he wanted to limit retaliation, he allowed further revenge, as if they lost an eye, they could take no more than an eye.

‘You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.’ (Matthew 5:38-39 NRSV)

- ♦ **Build up wealth.** There are many teachings in the Gospels where Jesus tells people not to store money or care about possessions. The implication here is that people should focus on other important things – Christians should be concerned with the needs of others, and not with possessions. Also, money is not permanent.

‘Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal... You cannot serve God and wealth.’ (Matthew 6:19-21 NRSV)

- ♦ **Worry.** Jesus teaches that worrying cannot help people, and so it is better to trust in God. The implication is that worry shows lack of faith – if people trust that God will provide for them, they do not need to worry.

‘But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow and is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith?’ (Matthew 6:30 NRSV)

- ♦ **Judge others.** Jesus taught that as all people sin, it is hypocritical to judge others for sinning, or look down on them, when everyone sins. So it is better to be a better person than condemning others for how wrong they are. This is a teaching for modern Christians to remember, as there are many who judge others for various reasons – Jesus taught that this was wrong.

‘You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbour’s eye.’ (Matthew 7:5 NRSV)

- ♦ **Profane the holy.** Jesus teaches not to mistreat what is holy. This teaching has many interpretations, and not every Christian believes the same one(s). Many people teach Christianity to those they know will harm them for doing so. Maybe Christians should not teach others badly if they believe them to be sinful, but neither should they teach Christianity where it will be misunderstood and misused. If you want to know more interpretations, you can research them online.

‘Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample under foot and turn and maul you.’ (Matthew 7:6 NRSV)

What Jesus Commands People to do

- ◆ **Let your light shine** for others. Show others how Christians are good and show how wonderful God is.

‘In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see you and glorify to your Father in heaven.’ (Matthew 5:16 NRSV)

- ◆ **Reconcile with others.** Jesus taught that anger towards other human beings has not made up for, damage a person’s relationship with God – Christians should reconcile with others so they can concentrate on God and not on anger.

‘So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to them, then come and offer your gift.’ (Matthew 5:23–24 NRSV)

- ◆ **Love your enemies.** Jesus taught that people should want good for everyone, not just people only care about those who care about them, this does not mean people should go out of their way to care for all.

‘... Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...’ (Matthew 5:44 NRSV)

- ◆ **Give, pray, and fast** in secret. Jesus teaches that if people want to do good, charity, pray, fast, etc., then they should do it for God, and not to show off.

‘But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand has done, so that your charity may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.’ (Matthew 6:3 NRSV)

- ◆ **Forgive.** Jesus teaches that forgiveness is necessary – if people want to be forgiven for wrong which they do, they need to do the same for others.

‘For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.’ (Matthew 6:14 NRSV)

- ◆ **Ask God for what you need.** Christians need to have faith in God, and ask for what they need, rather than relying on themselves.

‘Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you.’ (Matthew 7:7 NRSV)

- ◆ **Treat others as you would want to be treated.** In the Golden Rule, Jesus taught that people should act towards others as they want to be acted towards – treat others as you would want to be treated with respect.

‘In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.’ (Matthew 7:12 NRSV)

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- ♦ **Put God's word into action.** Jesus teaches that Christians must both believe in him – to believe Jesus but not to follow his teachings is foolish.

'Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a house on rock.' (Matthew 7:24 NRSV)

Quick Questions

- 8) Give **three** of Jesus' teachings from the Sermon on the Mount.
- 9) Outline how Jesus' life and teachings were an example for Christians.

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Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection

Most Christians have come to believe that Jesus is God, and so during his time on earth he was **incarnate**; or God in the flesh (God and human at the same time). They also believe that Jesus was **crucified** (was crucified), came back to life again (was **resurrected**), and as

Keywords:

- ◆ **Incarnation** – in Christianity, the belief that Jesus was God in the flesh
- ◆ **covenant** – a promise between people and God, usually involving promises
- ◆ **Crucifixion** – when Jesus was put to death on a cross
- ◆ **Eucharist** – sacrament which involves sharing bread and wine in remembrance
- ◆ **Great Commission** – when the risen Jesus told his disciples to go and preach
- ◆ **Last Supper** – Jesus' final celebration of the Jewish Passover with his disciples
- ◆ **Lent** – the period of preparation before Easter. Christians remember Jesus' time of sacrifice Jesus made by dying
- ◆ **Passion** – referring to the events surrounding the suffering and death of Jesus
- ◆ **Passover** – an important Jewish festival celebrating God's deliverance of the Israelites from first-born, and slavery in Egypt
- ◆ **Sabbath** – the Jewish holy day
- ◆ **sacrament** – a particularly important worship practice which has even higher status in churches such as the Catholic and Orthodox Churches

Beliefs and Teachings about Jesus Arising from the Incarnation

Nature of the Person of Jesus as the Incarnate Son of God

The exact nature of Jesus as both God and human has been debated within Christianity.

- ◆ Some early Christians claimed that Jesus was completely God and merely appeared to be human.
- ◆ Some Christians have claimed that Jesus was a divine being, but not on the same level as God.
- ◆ Some Christians have believed, and still believe today, that Jesus was fully human, but had a special relationship with God. All humans can be referred to as God's children, so 'Son of God' does not necessarily indicate divine status, but rather that Jesus was a special human chosen by God with a special relationship with him.

As seen in the section on the Trinity, some Christian denominations, such as Unitarianism, do not interpret Bible passages to mean that Jesus was God incarnate. They show Jesus to be a special human. They do not feel that the incarnation shows God's will and died to save humanity, so they do not feel that the belief in the incarnation is significant as a mistake made by other religions.

- ◆ Mainstream Christianity teaches that Jesus was fully human and fully God. Most Christians feel that Jesus' human nature and divine nature were both present most of the time. When Jesus suffered, he felt pain as any other human would. Some Christians believe that, as a human, Jesus was not completely God. Some Christians believe that, as a human, Jesus was not completely God.

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Biblical Basis for the Teaching of the Incarnation

The word 'incarnation' originates in Latin; as such, it does not occur in the New Testament (which was written in Greek). The belief in the Incarnation is not universally held, and it is not clear if any of the **Gospel** writers and other writers of the New Testament did not believe in it. However, the New Testament can still be used to provide evidence for the Incarnation.

- ♦ John 1:1–18 claims that Jesus has existed as God since before **Creation** and is the **incarnation** of God.

'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us... Jesus Christ...' (John 1:1–18)

While this is an important passage for many Christians, some scholars suggest that it was added by a different author, later than the original Gospel. It may have been added to reflect early Christian beliefs about who Jesus was, and so some Christians may not accept it as part of the original Gospel.

- ♦ 1 Timothy 3:16 claims that God was revealed as a human [as Jesus].

'Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great: He (Or: God) was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory.' (1 Timothy 3:16 NRSV)

Many Christians believe that the incarnation came about by Mary, Jesus' human mother, being impregnated by the Holy Spirit – so Jesus had both human and divine parents.

'The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Lord will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35 NRSV)

References to Jesus' God-like Qualities / Divine Nature

- ♦ Jesus healed many people, including the Centurion's servant, a leper, the blind man, and he raised Lazarus from the dead (Luke 7 and 11).
- ♦ Jesus performed other **miracles**, such as making five loaves and two fish become food for a large crowd, turning water into wine, and calming a storm (Matthew 14, Mark 4).
- ♦ Jesus claimed the authority to forgive **sins** and cast out demons, typically which he backed up with his healing abilities (Mark 2 and 5, Matthew 9 and 10).
- ♦ Even though he was killed, he was **resurrected**, confirming his power over death (Mark 14–16, Luke 22–24, John 18–21).

Jesus' Humanity

The Bible also references Jesus' human nature – he is reported to:

- ♦ have eaten (e.g. Mark 3);
- ♦ have felt tired (e.g. John 4) and slept (e.g. Mark 4);
- ♦ have cried when his friend died (John 11:35);
- ♦ have suffered leading up to his death (e.g. Luke 23); and
- ♦ he died a painful death on the cross (e.g. Matthew 27).

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Christians do not believe that Jesus being the **incarnation** of God made him God. Christians also use Jesus' humanity to explain times in the Gospels where he has knowledge – if he were only God and not human, then this might not make sense.

Activity

Discuss with a friend how believing in the Incarnation might be reflected in a Christian's life compared with someone who does not believe in the Incarnation.

Importance to Christians of the Incarnation for their Life and Worship

Jesus being the Incarnation of God is important to Christians for a number of reasons:

- ◆ This shows God cared about Christians enough to become a human and die for them.
- ◆ This shows that Jesus had God's authority and taught his will, and so Christians can follow his teaching and practice for certain.
- ◆ This shows that God has power – to become human, raise the dead, people believe in God, and establishes that God has the power to grant life after death, meaning that Christians can look forward to the afterlife.
- ◆ It helps Christians to have a personal relationship with God, because they can see a relationship with them. Some Christians feel that by following Jesus they can come closer to God, and having an incarnated God makes it easier to relate to him.
- ◆ Belief in the Incarnation has led many Christians to see Jesus as a fulfilment of the Jewish **law**, meaning that they no longer need to follow this for their **sins** to be forgiven, as Jesus' sacrifice frees them from condemnation.
- ◆ Belief in Jesus being God incarnate (or the only incarnation of God) is unique to Christianity. Islam views Jesus as a **prophet**, and some Hindus believe that Jesus was one incarnation of God (or of one particular god) among many. Therefore, belief in the Incarnation sets Christians apart from people of other religions and is one of their core beliefs.



Painting of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Spirit is shown as a dove.

Crucifixion – Synopsis

The belief that Jesus died and was raised from the dead is of central importance to Christianity. These beliefs are expressed in the Apostle's **Creed** and the Nicene Creed. The events of Jesus' death and resurrection are often referred to as his '**Passion**', because the word passion comes from the Latin word for suffering. Jesus' Passion is remembered especially during **Lent** and at Easter, but it is also remembered throughout the year.

The **Gospel** accounts do not *all* agree on *all* the details of Jesus' **Passion** and the events that occur in some gospels and not others. (The Gospels are the four books in the Bible that tell the story of the life of Jesus.)

Before the Crucifixion:

Jesus eats a last meal (the **Last Supper**) with his **disciples**, where he shares with them that these are his body and blood given for them, and that they should share in the remembrance of him. He says that this is a new **covenant** – a promise to the world that God will forgive sins.

'Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:27-28 NRSV)

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After this, Jesus is betrayed by his disciple Judas. Jesus is tried in front of the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate; and in Luke's account by King Herod. The Roman Governor Pilate orders Pilate to kill Jesus.

Crucifixion:

Jesus is beaten and mocked by soldiers before being led to be crucified. They put a crown of thorns on his head, and mock him as the King of the Jews. In Matthew's, Mark's and Luke's Gospels the soldiers make a traveller called Simon of Cyrene carry Jesus' cross to the **Crucifixion**; in John's Gospel he carries it himself. Jesus is offered some type of wine, but refuses it.

Jesus is crucified between two other criminals, and the soldiers gamble for Jesus' clothing. The plaque on the cross detailing his crime states that he is the King of the Jews. Jesus is mocked, taunted and told to save himself by the Jewish authorities, and also by soldiers in some accounts. In Luke's Gospel he talks to the criminals either side of him. When one of them asks Jesus to remember him, Jesus tells him that he will be with him in heaven.

'Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. The place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. [Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing.]' (Luke 23:32-34 NRSV)

Different accounts convey different words of Jesus from the cross. For example, in Matthew's and Mark's accounts Jesus quotes Psalm 22, asking why God has forsaken him, and in Luke's Gospel Jesus commends his spirit to God before dying.

The sky goes dark from about midday until 3 o'clock in the afternoon, when Jesus dies. When Jesus dies, the curtain in the **Temple** is ripped in two. In some accounts, the Roman centurion, upon witnessing Jesus' death, states that he must have been God's son (Matthew and Mark), or that he must have been innocent (Luke).

'And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"' (Mark 15:38-39 NRSV)



Jesus' death is witnessed by some of the women who followed him. In John's Gospel soldiers pierce Jesus' side with a spear to check that he is dead.

Jesus' body is given to one of his followers, Joseph of Arimathea, to bury. Jesus is left on the crosses, as it was the day of preparation for the Passover.

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Resurrection – Synopsis

Jesus died on the Friday, and the **Sabbath** (Saturday) the next day was kept. Consequently, the women who followed Jesus could not go to prepare his body for burial until the morning. The **resurrection** story varies greatly between the different gospels. This section covers all four versions (in the order they appear in the Bible).

- ◆ In Matthew's Gospel, an angel appears to the women and tells them that Jesus has risen. Then Jesus appears to his **disciples** when the women have told them to go.

'Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet and worshipped him.' (Matthew 28:9 NRSV)

- ◆ In Mark's Gospel, a man (often presumed to be an angel) is sitting in the open tomb and tells the women that Jesus has been raised. In the longer ending of this Gospel, Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene and then to his disciples.
- ◆ In Luke's Gospel, two men (often presumed to be angels) appear to the women and tell them that Jesus has risen. The women are scared and tell the disciples. The disciples do not want to believe them, though Peter goes to investigate the tomb. Jesus then appears to two of his followers on a journey, though they do not realise who he is. He also appears to Simon Peter and his other disciples, preaching and teaching them. He tells them to wait in Jerusalem [for the Holy Spirit] and then to go and preach the good news about him.

Mary Magdalene is the only woman mentioned in all four Gospels. In Mark's Gospel, she is the first to see Jesus, and in Luke's Gospel, she is the first to see the risen Jesus. In Matthew's Gospel, she is the first to see the risen Jesus, and in John's Gospel, she is the first to see the risen Jesus. This is often referred to as the 'empty tomb' and is a key event in the resurrection story.

'While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood before them. The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but they said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has been raised." (Luke 24:4-5 NRSV)

- ◆ In John's Gospel, Mary Magdalene finds the empty tomb and alerts some of the disciples. Two angels sitting in the tomb, and then she sees Jesus. Then Jesus appears to the disciple Thomas, and then again when Thomas is present. Thomas is known as 'Doubting Thomas' because he would not believe that Jesus had risen until he saw him. Jesus then appears to his disciples again when they are fishing.

Ascension – Synopsis

The **ascension** is not specifically mentioned in Matthew's Gospel or John's Gospel. It is mentioned in Luke's Gospel and Acts. Luke's Gospel ends with Jesus telling his disciples to go out and teach about him and make disciples of all nations, implying that he is leaving them physically. This is known as the **Great Commission**. The ascension is also given in Mark's Gospel. John's Gospel ends with a conversation between Jesus and his disciples, and Acts begins with testimony from the Gospel writer.

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus blesses his **disciples** and ascends to heaven, and the Acts of the Apostles mentions that Jesus was taken up into heaven and seated next to God.

'While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.' (Luke 24:50-51 NRSV)

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The ascension is also recorded in the Book of Acts:

‘When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? Jesus has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go.”’ (Acts 1:9–11 NRSV)

Beliefs and Teachings about Jesus Arising from the Crucifixion/Resurrection/Ascension

- Jesus’ sacrifice replaced the Jewish **law**. (His body and blood are a new **covenant** instead of the Jewish covenant of the law.)
- Jesus was obedient to God’s will in submitting to death.
- Jesus loved humanity enough to die for them.
- Jesus was human, as he was able to die.
- Jesus believed that dying was his purpose – he did not try to stop the priests or Pilate from putting him to death.



Jesus prepared to die

Importance to Christians of the Crucifixion/Resurrection/Ascension for their Life and Worship

Christians believe that the purpose of Jesus’ life was so that he could teach and sacrifice to save humans from their **sin**. Christians believe that Jesus’ life and death created a new **covenant**, a promise between God and humankind. Jesus replaced the old covenant so that Christians no longer needed to follow this, but could instead be saved by faith.

Taking it further...

Why don’t you read Matthew 26–28, Mark 14–16, Luke 22–24, and John 18–21? How do these passages describe Jesus’ **passion** and resurrection narratives?

Different aspects of Jesus’ resurrection and crucifixion also have particular importance for Christians.

Aspect of Jesus’ last days	Importance and Significance
Jesus died at the time of the Passover festival	For Christians, Jesus became the Passover lamb. The Jews celebrated Passover to remember when they had marked their doorposts with blood so they were saved from the plague of death in Egypt, and from the Egyptians. Now, for Christians, Jesus was the sacrifice that saved them from sin.
Jesus’ death, predicted at the Last Supper	Many Christian denominations remember Jesus’ sacrifice through the sacrament of the Eucharist ; sharing bread and wine in memory of Jesus giving his life to save them from their sin – Jesus died because of his sacrifice.

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Aspect of Jesus' last days	Importance and Significance
	<p>Many Christians believe that various aspects of Jesus' death and resurrection correspond to Old Testament prophecy. Some believe that he is the 'suffering servant' mentioned in Isaiah 53. Some believe that soldiers gambling for Jesus' clothing and Jesus being mocked correspond with prophecies and were foretold (among other things). If Jesus fulfilled prophecy, this shows that sending Jesus to redeem humankind had been part of God's plan for a long time. (Note: Jews do not believe these prophecies were fulfilled, and do not believe that all are prophecies in the first place.)</p>
	<p>When Jesus had spoken about destroying the Temple and rebuilding it (he does this in his trial in front of the Jewish Council in some gospels), the Jews had assumed he meant the Temple in Jerusalem where they worshipped. After his death it was interpreted that he meant himself; that God dwelt within him. Especially when the Jewish Temple was destroyed, less than 50 years after Jesus' death, Christians saw Jesus as replacing the physical Temple – that they should worship God through Jesus, not through animal sacrifices, when Jesus was the final sacrifice.</p>
	<p>The Temple curtain separated the Holy of Holies (the part of the Temple where God was supposed to dwell) from the rest of the Temple. The tearing of the curtain was seen to symbolise that Jesus' death had removed the barrier between people and God – he reconciled them. Christians today believe that anyone can come to God and have a relationship with him through Jesus.</p> <p>Christians believe that this applies to gentiles (non-Jews) as well as Jews – that Jesus' death removed the barrier between God and all of humanity.</p>
	<p>Christians believe that Jesus overcame sin and death, and brought them salvation. The religion of Christianity has continued due to belief in his resurrection, and which Christians celebrate at Easter time.</p>
	<p>These show Jesus' divinity and remind Christians of his power and authority – he could overcome death and rise to heaven. As Jesus ascended to heaven, he is believed to be alive – able to help and watch over Christians.</p>

Points on the Significance of Crucifixion/Resurrection/Ascension

Some Christians emphasise the importance of the **crucifixion** over the **resurrection** – they feel that the significance was Jesus dying to **save** humanity from **sin**. Protestants tend to emphasise the crucifixion – they feel that this was when Jesus overcame death, allowing Christians

to believe that Jesus **ascended** to heaven. For most this is significant because it means that Jesus is in heaven. It can also be seen to be significant because it reflects the **prophet** Elijah taken up into heaven without dying in the **Old Testament**.

Most Christians believe that Jesus was resurrected physically – that his body was raised from the dead. Biblical evidence for this includes Jesus' tomb being empty, Jesus eating, and Jesus allowing people to touch his crucifixion wounds.

'Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but by itself.' (John 20:6-7 NRSV)

'Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and touch my side. Do not doubt but believe.'" (John 20:27 NRSV)

However, some Christians (often modern Protestants) believe that Jesus was not in his body – the resurrected Jesus could do things which humans could not, such as appearing in a locked room.

'... he vanished from their sight.' (Luke 24:31 NRSV)

'When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you.'" (John 20:19 NRSV)

However, many Christians who believe in a physical resurrection believe that the resurrected Jesus was different in some way, so that it could do these things.

Belief in a physical resurrection is significant, because it shows God's power to be able to resurrect physical bodies, and his complete control over the world. However, belief in a spiritual resurrection is still significant because it means that God can raise a person's spirit from the dead.

Pause

What do you think about the fact that Jesus' disciples did not see him from the dead? Write your answer in the space below.

Quick Questions

- 10) Give **three** reasons why the Jesus of the Gospels seems divine.
- 11) Outline **three** things which happened at Jesus' crucifixion (according to the Gospels).

Now Try This...

- 12) 'Christians should believe that Jesus was God.' Discuss this statement.

Analyse and evaluate the importance of points of view for and against the resurrection, and refer to sources of wisdom and authority.

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The Concept of Salvation

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Keywords:

- ♦ **atonement** – making up for something; in Christianity, Jesus achieving salvation by paying a price

Salvation

Salvation refers to the view within Christianity that Christians have been saved from death and resurrection, from **sin** and its consequences (death). This means death, or punishment, and can have a new start, having faith that God loves them. Salvation restores the relationship between God and humans which had been broken. Sinners are forgiven.

Christians believe that doing wrong (**sin**) separates them from God, and can lead to death. However, Jesus died instead – he paid the price which they should have paid. Now they can have a relationship with God, a clean slate. Also, when they die, this will be their final rest on with God in heaven. So salvation is important because it offers Christians a new start, opportunities and cancels their debt of sin – God forgives them.

'For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Romans 6:23 NRSV)

Different ideas about salvation:

Christians accept that there is salvation because Jesus died and rose again. However, there are different views about who can receive salvation, and how.

One view which some Christians, such as St Augustine, hold is that salvation is given by God and that God has **predestined** who to save; chosen them at the beginning of time. If you have sinned, they have no right to salvation, and God has not chosen to save everyone. This means that humans do not have to worry about being perfect, because God does not require the individual has done.

A second view held by some Christians is that humans have **free will** to choose whether to accept what Jesus has done for them, and that salvation is down to the individual. You must accept grace and follow Jesus. This seems positive because no one is automatically excluded. There is no pressure on Christians to believe and live good lives.



How to remember this?

Some people liken the first view of salvation, through predestination (being chosen by God), to a cat. Cats pick their young up by the neck to carry them.

Some people liken the second view of salvation, where the human must reach out to God, to a monkey. Baby monkeys must grab onto their mothers to be carried.

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Atonement

Atonement refers to *how* Jesus achieved **salvation**, and how he redeemed for (or atoned for) their sins, so saved them from the consequences.

Atonement is a significant concept because it explains how it was possible for God to pay humans' debt himself and heal the rift between God and humans. If God had atoned for humans' sins, he could not have brought them salvation. God saved humanity in this way, through Jesus' actions.

Different ideas about atonement – nature of atonement for sin

There are different ideas about how Jesus managed to atone for sin and save humanity. Some think Jesus could pay the price to redeem humans because he was human, but he was able to because he was **divine**. Some think Jesus achieved atonement through sacrifice – ransom – necessary for sin – death (this view is used throughout because it is a common theme). Jesus' sacrifice defeated the devil, so that he could no longer control sinners. Atonement is a mysterious and not fully explainable.

[Jesus, speaking about himself:] 'For the Son of Man came not to be served but to give his life a ransom for many.' (Mark 10:45 NRSV)

The link between salvation and atonement: Salvation is *what* Christians believe Jesus did for them – he saved humanity. Atonement refers to *how* Christians believe he did it – through his sacrifice.

Law

Before Jesus, Jews aimed to achieve **salvation** through following God's law (the Jewish **law**) – most Jews still follow the Jewish law. The point of having a law was that it could show what was right and wrong – what was a **sin** and what wasn't. If there was a command not to do something, then people knew that it was a sin and could avoid it. Equally, if there was a commandment *to* do something (e.g. worship in a certain way) people knew that to act in a way which did *not* fulfil this was sinful.

However, many Christians believe that the law was not a permanent solution. Jesus replaced this. Instead of following a written law, they should instead follow the principles perfectly expressed in Jesus.

'This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days: I will put my laws in their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.' (Hebrews 8:10 NRSV)

Because of Jesus, Christians today can feel free from sin, and also free from the law. This is not to say that they can do anything they want, but that they do not need to purify themselves, and that if they do something wrong and repent, they are forgiven. This means Christians do not have to fear death, or punishment, and have faith that God loves and cares for them.

However, while Christians do not follow all of the rules in the **Old Testament**, they should follow the principles of God's law – just because Jesus died for humans, it doesn't mean that Christians can do anything they like. However, St Paul makes it clear that we are saved by following the law, only by following Jesus.

'... yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ' (Galatians 2:16 NRSV)

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Sin

The term '**sin**' often refers to acting against God's will, but can also refer to God due to humans not matching up to God's perfection. The consequences are death and hell – if people act against God, they will be punished by dying and going to hell. Christians believe that if they confess their sins and ask God to forgive them, then they will go to heaven, but will receive eternal life in heaven. The Apostles' **Creed** and the Nicene Creed state the belief that God has forgiven / will forgive sins.

As seen in the sections on *Biblical Accounts of Creation* and *The Problem of a Loving and Righteous God*, there are two types of sin within Christianity – original sin (though not all Christians believe in original sin). To recap, original sin is a sin inherited by humans, and personal sin is where humans individually choose to disobey God.

Jesus can be seen as a second Adam, who came to remedy the **Fall** and/or the broken relationship with God despite sin. Regardless of whether humans inherit sin, humans will sometimes, and so they need **saving** – through Jesus.

St Paul believed that all humans have committed sin, none are perfect like God.

'... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...' (Romans 3:23 NRSV)

Jesus gave many teachings on sin, recorded in the **New Testament**. He taught sinners, to rescue people from the consequences of sin. He told many people they were forgiven and preached that God would forgive the sins of those who repent and turn to God's authority to forgive sins.

'For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.' (Matthew 9:13 NRSV)

'When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

'If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' (John 20:23 NRSV)

Jesus also taught that sin was severe – it should be avoided at all costs.

'And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to go into hell.' (Matthew 5:30 NRSV)

Further, Jesus corrected a misconception about sin which was common at the time – that God would punish sin on Earth, and God's favour would be a sign of sinlessness or God's favour.

'His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind, but his sight might be revealed in him.'" (John 9:2-3 NRSV)

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Grace and the Spirit

Christians believe that **grace** is a spiritual gift which God can give to people in order to save them. For example, Christians believe that sending Jesus to save humans was an extension of God's grace – his redeeming love.

'From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.'
(John 1:16 NRSV)



The Holy Spirit, the third Person of God in the **Trinity**, is also believed to be able to send his grace; by sending Christians the Holy Spirit to help them in their faith. This is seen as a gift of the Spirit. Many Christians feel that they can also receive God's grace through teaching in the **Bible** and through **sacraments**; for example, reliving Jesus' death and accepting a new spiritual life through **baptism**.

'To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit.' (1 Corinthians 12:8)

'For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.' (Romans 8:2 NRSV)

Christian's belief in grace is important – they feel that without God's grace they would not have been saved. God would not have sent Jesus.

'... they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.' (Romans 3:24 NRSV)

The Role of Christ in Salvation – Common and Divergent Christian Beliefs

Jesus' role in **salvation** is that he brought humans salvation – without him, humans have no chance at a relationship with God. This is expressed in the Nicene **Creed**. In John 3, Jesus tells to a man called Nicodemus that he has come from heaven, so that those who believe in him will have eternal life (live forever). He explains that those who believe will be **saved**, while those who do not will not be saved.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." (John 3:16 NRSV)

Christians, from the beginning of Christianity, have taught that salvation comes through faith in Jesus' **disciple** Peter proclaimed this in Acts 4:8–12 – that everyone must believe in Jesus.

"There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12 NRSV)

Some people wonder why Jesus had to die to end this separation between humans and God. Why couldn't he just click his fingers and make everything ok if he wanted to? One Christian belief is that God is both **just** and **merciful**. Wrong had been done, so a just God *has* to punish. However, he is merciful and wants to forgive. The solution: he accepts that humans are sinful and he can forgive humanity. This is like paying a debt for a friend – the debt must be paid, but he pays it instead of them.

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While all Christians believe that Jesus has brought them salvation, there are different views on how salvation works (as seen above). Some Christians, including Calvinists, believe that salvation is only available for certain people – people cannot freely choose it, because God has already chosen who to save before they were even conceived.

It can be argued that some Christians focus so much on **predestination**, that they believe that salvation comes from the act of God predestining their salvation alone and not through resurrection.

Lutherans believe that those who have **faith** are predestined to be saved. They believe that people are saved through their faith (in Jesus), and not what they do – because the resurrection comes through Jesus' death and **resurrection**, and not through actions.

'For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast.' (Ephesians 2:8–9 NRSV)

Lutherans and Calvinists would interpret Ephesians 2:8–9 to mean that God has chosen who to save (as a gift), and so no one can choose to come to God, without God choosing to save them).

However, other Christians believe that while God has chosen that those who believe in Jesus are saved, humans still have **free will** to choose whether to come to God and accept salvation. They fall into this category. They feel that Jesus brought all the possibility of salvation to the world from God, not through anything humans have done to deserve it. However they interpret faith being a 'gift' to mean that God has offered it to all – anyone can choose to accept faith, and then God saves them.



Stained glass window showing Jesus telling his disciples to go into the world and preach the Gospel to all creation.

Belief in Forgiveness and Repentance for All

These differing views on **predestination**, **free will**, **faith** and **salvation** have raised issues for Christians. In several places in the Gospels, Jesus says that he has come for all. He tells his disciples to proclaim to all peoples 'repentance and forgiveness of sins' – in other words that those who repent will be forgiven.

'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.' (Matthew 28:11 NRSV)

'... and [Jesus] said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.'" (Luke 24:46–47 NRSV)

This can be seen to suggest that all people can choose to come to God – all can be forgiven. Other places in the New Testament also suggest that God wants everyone to be saved, and cannot have chosen only certain people to be saved.

'The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.' (2 Peter 3:9 NRSV)

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Taking it further...

Find out more about different beliefs about free will, predestination

However, Calvinists, Lutherans, and many other Christians do not believe that everyone is forgiven – because God has only chosen to save certain people. Some also believe that God has chosen to damn those who he has not chosen to save – they have no hope of forgiveness as a consequence of predestination, but many who believe in predestination do not believe that God does not actively choose to damn others, but that their damnation is just the result of their sins, and of not being saved.)

Christians, such as Calvinists and Lutherans, interpret these Bible verses in different ways. For all who are weary, this does not imply *everyone* – some may not be weary. Some Christians proclaim forgiveness to all peoples/places – this does not imply that all individuals are forgiven, but just that people in all different places have this option.

Even passages such as 2 Peter 3 (which was a letter) could be taken as referring to those who will be saved, rather than all people everywhere. Many Bible verses do not say that Jesus will be saved, and so Calvinists and Lutherans can argue that these passages are not meant to have faith. Others, such as Methodists can argue that faith is a free choice.

‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but may have eternal life.’ (John 3:16 NRSV)

Common and Divergent Christian Beliefs about the Need for Salvation

All Christians believe that they need **salvation** – all **sin**, and all should have faith. However, reasons for needing salvation differ, as do primary motivations for needing salvation.

Churches which believe in **original sin**, such as the Catholic Church, believe that humans are born into sin and need to be reunited with God because of how Adam and Eve damaged humanity (as a result of **personal sins**).

Christians who do not accept original sin, such as many modern Protestants, believe that humans need saving due to something which Adam and Eve did, but rather they need saving because of what they themselves have done (they believe that all humans are imperfect and will sin).

Orthodox Christians are mainly concerned with needing salvation as a way of ensuring that they have a relationship with him.

Some branches of Christianity, such as Calvinism emphasise needing salvation as a way of avoiding punishment of sin.

Quick Questions

13) Describe the concept of salvation.

Now Try This...

14) Explain why beliefs about salvation and atonement are important to Christianity.

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Eschatological Beliefs and Teachings

Christians believe in an afterlife – that there will be another life after death. This is an important belief within Christianity.

Keywords:

- ♦ **catechism** – here, official Catholic teaching
- ♦ **eschatology** – anything to do with the end of things, such as the end of life; this has a religious context
- ♦ **heaven** – a place people go after death, where God is
- ♦ **hell** – a place people go after death away from God
- ♦ **immortality of the soul** – where a spiritual part of a person continues forever
- ♦ **judgment** – when people will be rewarded or punished for their lives
- ♦ **parables** – stories with an inner meaning, for the purpose of teaching
- ♦ **Parousia** – Greek for arriving or coming, here this means the second coming of Christ
- ♦ **purgatory** – a place Catholics believe people may go after death to do penance for sins
- ♦ **resurrection of the body** – the physical raising of a person who is dead

Resurrection and life after death (resurrection of the body and immortality of the soul)

Not all Christians agree on how life after death works. Some believe that God will raise humans' physical bodies at the end of time. Others believe that a spiritual part of a person, their soul, lives on after death and goes straight to

heaven/hell/purgatory (see the section on these below).

Some Christians believe in both; that the soul will enter the afterlife immediately after death, but that there will be a bodily **resurrection** for everyone at **judgment** at the end of time, where souls and bodies are reunited. In other words, people will enter a spiritual realm after death based on their actions during their life, and many will go to purgatory to **atone** for sins (see more on this below). At the end of time, God will judge everyone on their actions during life *and* after death, and people will then enter either heaven or hell for the rest of eternity (people who had previously been in purgatory have the chance to enter heaven).



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Therefore, there are varied beliefs about the nature of resurrection: some believe it is immediate at death; some believe that it is delayed until the end of time; some believe that people will be resurrected while some believe that it will not be, and that in heaven the bodies, completely different to earthly bodies. However, all Christians agree that this is available to them because Jesus has saved them and God has the power to resurrect them.

(These interpretations of resurrection correspond with different interpretations of the afterlife. Some Christians believe that people will remain dead until the last judgement, while others believe it is just a brief transition – after death they will be spiritually in heaven.)

Different Bible passages support different ideas about resurrection.

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Some Christians believe in **resurrection of the body** because Jesus was raised from the dead in a new sort of bodily form, and he raised others from the dead physically; for example, Jairus' daughter (Mark 5). Also, Jesus taught that the dead will be raised from the dead at the end of time. St Paul questioned how Christians could doubt resurrection when Jesus was raised from the dead. The Apostles' **Creed** and the Nicene Creed are taken to affirm belief in resurrection (see the Nicene Creed).

“Do not be astonished at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will come out...” (John 5:28–29 NRSV)

‘Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?’ (1 Corinthians 15:12 NRSV)

Many Christians believe that when their body is resurrected, it will be different from the current body in some sense spiritual:

‘...flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God... For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on immortality.’ (1 Corinthians 15:50, 52–53 NRSV)

However, other Christians believe in **immortality of the soul** because Jesus taught that he would be in heaven that day, which implies that he would not die again (John 6:47; 17:2), not life which ends and then starts again at some point in the future. Some Christians believe that the thieves on the cross that he would be in heaven that day, which implies that he would not die again. (With reference to the previous question, some Christians believe that Christians will get improved spiritual bodies in heaven immediately after death.)

[to the thief on the cross] “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:43 NRSV)

The Catholic Church teaches that both will happen, because the Bible teaches both. The Church does not want to deny any teachings of Jesus.

Activity

Find some more Bible quotes which support different ideas about resurrection.

Resurrection is important because:

- ◆ Christians believe that there will be life after death.
 - This can comfort them because they know death will not be the end.
 - This can encourage them to live good lives because they know God will reward them.
- ◆ The existence of resurrection illuminates the character of God.
 - God is powerful enough to overcome death (demonstrated by Jesus being brought back to life in the Bible).
 - God is loving and forgiving – he wants humans to enjoy heaven with him.

‘But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.’ (1 Corinthians 15:20 NRSV)

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Heaven, Hell (and Purgatory)

Most Christians believe in **heaven**, which is a place where people will be with God. From the passages about **judgment** and the end of time, Jesus says he will take his **disciples** in heaven (John 14:1–4). Those writing in the New Testament also describe life after death, as expressed in 1 Corinthians 5:1–10.

‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.’ (John 14:1–6 NRSV)

‘For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building made with hands, eternal in the heavens.’ (2 Corinthians 5:1 NRSV)

Christians believe that heaven is a desirable place to be; some believe that it is beyond human standards e.g. there will be great banquets (Jesus compared heaven to a banquet). Some believe that in heaven humans will spend their time constantly praising God.

‘... they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night without ceasing. The one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; neither will the sun strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.’ (Revelation: 7:15–17 NRSV)

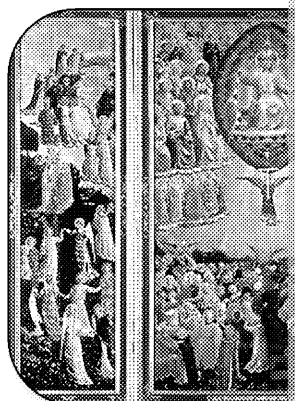
Most Christians also believe in **hell**, somewhere outside of heaven and away from God. In the story about judgment Jesus does not make hell sound very nice. It is compared to being thrown out into the darkness.

“... [being thrown out into the darkness], where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 25:30 NRSV)

Hell has been portrayed in many different ways. In medieval times, ‘doom’ paintings, portraying final judgment, were common on the walls of churches, to remind Christians that they wanted to go to heaven and not be condemned to the terrors of hell.

However, many Christians today do not believe that hell is a place of physical torture (which was believed in medieval times). They believe that hell is the absence of God, or even that those who go to ‘hell’ stop existing altogether.

Jesus taught that sin would cause people to go to hell – and that it was better to die than to go to hell. If people do sin, then the punishment of hell will be terrible.



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'If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.' (Matthew 5:29–30)

Some Christians, believe in a place called **purgatory**, where Christians can go to atone for their sins before being allowed to enter heaven. Belief in purgatory is taught by the Catholic Church. Catholics **pray** for those they believe to be in purgatory, in the hope of helping them. However, many other churches, such as the Church of England, teach that belief in purgatory. They believe it is not supported by the Bible.

The Catholic Church argues that it is supported in the Bible. For example, Jesus said that sins cannot be forgiven now, or after death. The Catholic Church takes this to mean that sins can only be forgiven after death – and if they are not forgiven before death then people must go to purgatory to purify themselves after death in order to be forgiven – *in purgatory*.

“Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.”

The Catholic **Catechism** also points out that the tradition of praying for the dead is found in the **Old Testament**. If people were already in heaven or hell forever after death, there would be no sense to pray for them.

However, it can be argued that sins might be forgiven at judgment without the need for purgatory after death, and, especially with belief in resurrection of the body, that praying for the dead that God will judge the dead more favourably at a future judgment.

Belief in heaven, hell and purgatory is significant, as it encourages Christians to live good lives. These beliefs are also significant because they create boundaries between different beliefs. The different beliefs about purgatory held by the Church of England and Catholicism are significant.

Judgment

Judgment is the event at the end of time and/or when each individual person is judged for their actions. People are judged based on what they believed, and whether they lived a good or bad life. Judgment results in people being sent to heaven, hell or purgatory (see the next section). (**Note:** If Christians, such as Catholics, believe in **immortality of the soul** and resurrection, they believe that people are judged twice – when they die *and* at the end of time.)

Judgment is important because it decides the eternal fate of a person – whether they go to heaven or condemned.

Jesus taught that after death people would be judged depending on how they lived their lives. They were prepared for God and his Kingdom. He told **parables**, or stories, such as Aesop's fables, to explain what **judgment** and the end of time would be like. Examples include the parable of the sheep and the goats, and the parable of the ten bridesmaids. The Nicene Creed teaches that Jesus will judge humanity at the end of time.

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The parable of the sheep and the goats Matthew 25:31–46 NRSV

Jesus will come back at the end of time and separate the people (sheep) from the bad people (goats). He will grant the sheep the 'kingdom' and 'eternal life' because they fed him, watered him, welcomed him, clothed him, and cared for him when he was sick. The sheep will ask when they did these things for him. Jesus will tell them that when they did these things for him, they did it for him.

He will then tell the goats that they did not care for others and help them. They will be condemned to 'eternal punishment'.

'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you are doing it to me.' (Matthew 25:40 NRSV)

The Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids Matthew 25:1–12

Ten bridesmaids were waiting for the bridegroom, but he was delayed, so they took five had brought extra oil for their lamps. When the bridegroom (representing Jesus) came, the five with extra oil had run out. They had to go to buy some more. When they got back to the wedding (heaven), everyone else had gone in, but the doors were locked and they were not ready for the kingdom of heaven to come at any time.

It was not just Jesus who taught that people would be judged at the end of time. Many people believed in judgment and continued to teach about judgment.

'For all of us must appear before the judgement seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.' (2 Corinthians 5:10)

Taking it further...

Read more about the end of time: Matthew 24–25, including the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids. Those who use their gifts will be judged favourably and those who do not will be judged unfavourably.

Interestingly, when talking about judgement, biblical teachings generally refer to people's actions and whether they have done good or bad. However, many Christians believe that people will be saved and inherit eternal life based on their **faith** and following Jesus, regardless of what they have done. Therefore, there is a tension between Christians who claim that people will be judged on their behaviour, and Christians who argue that those with faith will be saved.

'For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast.' (Ephesians 2:8–9 NRSV)

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Importance and Influence Today

Because Christians believe Jesus died so that they could have eternal life, many Christians believe that death is not the end. Those who feel that they are living lives pleasing to God may not fear death because they believe that life after death is not the end. The teachings about life after death are important because they help Christians to make decisions, knowing that they will be judged after death.

““Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live”” (John 11:25 NRSV)

The teachings of judgment in the New Testament also encourage Christians to consider a ‘good’ life (for example, taking care of the hungry and the sick, shepherding the sheep and the goats, Matthew 25), in order not to ‘go to **hell**’. So the teachings about life after death are important because they help Christians to make decisions, knowing that they will be judged after death. The teachings about life after death are not reassuring, but scary – in order to know what will happen if they are not good.

Because some Christians believe that they should focus on the afterlife, belief in life after death is important in influencing them to isolate themselves from normal life – many Christians have felt that because they value the afterlife more than human life that they should focus on worshipping God and on the afterlife.

Some Christians interpret...

““No one comes to the Father except through me [Jesus]”” (John 14:6 NRSV)

... to mean that only Christians will go to **heaven** – such Christians, therefore, feel that they must believe and practice Christianity in order to go to heaven when they die. This often leads to Christians trying to convert others to Christianity so that they too can experience heaven. This belief is important because it influences Christians’ views of non-Christians and also their actions – without such a belief they might not be as concerned with converting others to Christianity.

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However, other Christians interpret John 14:6 as meaning that no one can experience God except through Christianity, but that people can experience God in other ways. This belief is important, as those who hold it will feel that people of other religions are also seeking God and it may prompt them to work with people of other religions for common goals. Ultimately, all people ultimately want the same things.

Apocalyptic Ideas in the Early Church

There is evidence that Christians in the Early Church believed that the world would end in their lifetime. Indeed, Jesus seemed to suggest that he believed that the world would end in his lifetime. This implied that he would come to judge (at the end of time) within the lifetime of his followers.

‘For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and to reward each according to what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they have seen the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.’ (Matthew 16:27–28 NRSV)

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Jesus also gave warning signs of the end of the 'age', especially in Matthew 24 because he says that it would not be the end when the signs occur, but that the end of time was coming, and that the signs of the end of the world would come.

'Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.' (Matthew 24:34 NRSV)

The apostles also continued this teaching – many of St Paul's teachings can be seen in his letters. He believed the world would end soon. For example, he encouraged people to not have children).

'Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion. The Lord's mercy is trustworthy. I think that, in view of the impending crisis, it is better for you to be as I am... I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short. The world is passing away.' (1 Corinthians 7:25-26, 29, 31 NRSV)

Common and Divergent Beliefs about the Second Coming of Christ (Part 1)

However, clearly the world did not end during the first or second century. While early Christians may have believed this, Christians today cannot. All Christians believe that the world will end one day, and that Jesus will **judge** humans at the end of their lives and/or at the final judgement. However, Christians today differ in what they believe will happen, and when.

Firstly, Christians have tried to explain how the passages of Jesus' teaching can be re-interpreted so that they are not wrong. This can be done in various ways – they can reinterpret words such as 'generation' to mean a span of time much longer than what humans would normally class as a generation. Some believe that the return Jesus spoke of was spiritual – that he brought his followers the Kingdom of **Heaven** (on Earth) after his death. Some feel that Jesus correctly predicted the beginning of the end of the world – and that the world has just been ending very slowly – for example they may feel he predicted the destruction of the **Temple** in 70CE. Some believe that Jesus' teaching refers to the **immortality of the soul** (Christians would not truly 'taste death' as they would believe the soul lives on).

There are many interpretations, and if you are interested, you will find many. However, it can be argued that none of them are fully satisfactory. Many people expect the end of the world in their lifetime, and do not concentrate on this. Others also point to Jesus' teaching that even he did not know exactly when the world would end – so they feel that they should be ready.

'But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father... Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.' (Matthew 24:36, 44 NRSV)

However, there are some Christians today who are actively expecting the end of the world. They have heard about 'rapture predictions' on the news. There are many groups of Christians, including some Protestant **evangelicals**. For example, some Afrikaner Calvinists believe that the end of the world is coming after the end of apartheid (racial segregation in South Africa).

Some Christians who are concerned with the end of the world coming soon believe that when Jesus returns he will rule the Earth for a period of time (some believe exactly 1000 years, a millennium) before judgement (most mainstream Christians believe that Jesus is ruling in heaven now).

There are many different types of millennialism; many believe that the second coming will be heralded by terrible events.

'And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars; see that you are not alarmed, for this is the beginning of the birth pangs. But the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the birth pangs' (Matthew 24:6-8 NRSV)

Some Christians have supported wars in the Middle East, and are not concerned about believing that these are necessary, and even desirable, as they want Jesus to return. They believe that true Christians will experience a *rapture* – they will be taken up into heaven either during, or after the Earth reaches the climax of the terrible events (even though many Christians believe that world events are the start of the end of the world do not believe that they are at that stage yet).

Quick Questions

- 15) Name **three** examples of places which Christians may believe people will be taken up to heaven.
- 16) Describe the concept of life after death within Christianity.

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Summary for Beliefs and Teachings

- ♦ The Christian God is believed to have many characteristics, such as **benign** (all-knowing), **omnipotent** (all-powerful), **eternal**, **transcendent**, **immortal**, **merciful** and **forgiving**. He is believed to be a **judge**. Christianity is **monotheistic** – Christians believe in and worship only one God.
- ♦ Many Christians believe in one God, in three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit – the **Trinity**. Some Christians believe that there is an authority structure within the Trinity. Not all Christians believe in the Trinity – some feel that Jesus was not God.
- ♦ Christians believe that God **created** the world. Accounts of this are found in the Bible, such as in the Book of John. Christians may take from accounts of Creation that they are special beings made in God's image, and that they should look after creation. Some Christians believe that the Bible should be interpreted **literally**, while others think they should be interpreted **metaphorically**. Christians believe in the **Fall** – that Adam and Eve's **sin** caused human suffering.
- ♦ The problem of **evil** and **suffering** exists because it is hard to explain why a good and righteous God allows evil and suffering to exist. Believers may question why their God should not allow **natural evil** or **moral evil**. Some Christians believe that suffering exists as a consequence of the **Fall** and **original sin**.
- ♦ Christians believe that Jesus is the **Messiah** (anointed one) who came to Earth. They refer to him as '**Lord**' and believe he is the **Son of God** – most of his teachings. Jesus showed Christians that they should love others, regardless of who they are or the circumstances – **agape**. Many of Jesus' teachings can be found in the Gospels, such as Matthew 5–7.
- ♦ Many Christians believe that Jesus was the **incarnation** of God: God in human form. In the Incarnation, Christians may feel that they know what God wants through Jesus. They believe they are saved through his sacrifice. Christians believe that Jesus was crucified, died and rose back to life. After being witnessed by his disciples and giving them instructions, he went to heaven. Christians believe that his death and **resurrection** saved them and restored a relationship with God.
- ♦ Christians believe that Jesus brought them **salvation** by dying for them. Jesus **atoned** (made up) for their **sin**. Christians have different views on whether salvation is for a few, or whether it is available to all who seek it and Jesus lives. Many Christians believe that Jesus fulfilled the **Jewish law** so that they are saved through Jesus, rather than by following rules. Christians believe that God's love is his **grace**. Christians believe that all humans need saving because of their **sin**.
- ♦ Christians have various understandings concerning the afterlife. Jesus taught that people would be **judged** after death and that they should be prepared for God's Kingdom. Most Christians believe in **heaven** and **hell** and some believe in **purgatory**, a place to do penance before heaven. Some Christians believe that God will **resurrect** people's physical bodies at the end of time, and some believe that the **soul** lives on immediately after death and is **immortal**; some believe in both. Some Christians believe that only Christians will go to heaven, because Jesus is the only way to God, but not all do. Early Christians believed that the world would end very soon, possibly within their lifetime, but many Christians do not expect the imminent end of the world today. However, some Christians do, and believe that Jesus will come back to rule on Earth for a period of time before judgement.

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Answers

Mark Schemes for 6-mark and 15-mark Questions

4 marks for knowledge and understanding
Incomplete understanding of question and little knowledge demonstrated.
Slightly more understanding of question and knowledge demonstrated, but not much.
A decent level of knowledge, but not quite enough / not applied fully.
Knowledge and understanding are demonstrated well.
2 marks for analysis and evaluation
A limited attempt at analysis and evaluation.
Analysis and evaluation are demonstrated well, and different views are considered.

3 marks for knowledge and understanding
Incomplete understanding of question and little knowledge demonstrated.
A decent level of knowledge, but not quite enough / not applied fully.
Knowledge and understanding are demonstrated well.
12 marks for analysis and evaluation
One argument with some justification or several arguments with no justification. Little material and no conclusion.
Little justification of ideas, and little or no reference to different Christian views. Errors in understanding of material, or interpretation of question. A poor conclusion.
Some different views with some justification. Some comparison. Not quite enough analysis and evaluation. A decent conclusion.
A good range of different views, well justified. Good comparison, analysis and evaluation. A good and balanced conclusion.

Beliefs and Teachings

Question Number	Answer / Mark Scheme
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Omnipotent means all-powerful. The Christian God is believed to have great physical power, e.g. creating and performing miracles. Many Christians also believe that God has spiritual power to give people wisdom and help them to make decisions. <p>Accept any relevant point, 1 mark per point/development/example (maximum 3 marks)</p>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Christian God has given humans many commands, such as the Ten Commandments. He must judge whether they keep to them. Christians believe that God is just, and so he will judge between those who are right and wrong and reward and punish accordingly. Jesus taught that God will judge those who help others as righteous, and those who harm or help others negatively. <p>Accept any relevant point, 1 mark per point/development/example (maximum 3 marks)</p>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Catholics believe that God the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Christians believe that God is one being but three persons. Many Christians believe that God the Son helped God with creation and became the person of Jesus. <p>Accept any relevant point, 1 mark per point/development/example (maximum 3 marks)</p>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Humans have dominion, they should control the world. Humans are stewards, they should look after the world. Humans should procreate and multiply. <p>Accept any relevant point, 1 mark per point/development/example (maximum 3 marks)</p>

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Question Number	Answer / Mark Scheme	Number of Marks
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Christians can believe that God did not really create the universe in six days, but over a longer period of time, using the Big Bang to start everything. Christians can believe that God created humans and animals through evolution rather than as they are now. Christians can believe that Genesis 3 describes how humans in general choose to disobey God, rather than explaining a real instance of disobedience. <p>Accept any relevant point, 1 mark per point/development/example (maximum 3)</p>	(3 marks)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Christians may feel that there is evil and suffering because it was more loving for God to give humans free will and allow evil than to make humans puppets. There can be moral evil because humans are free to hurt others. Christians may feel that the first moral evil occurred at the Fall. Christians may also feel that natural evil is a punishment for humans disobeying God. <p>Accept any relevant point, 1 mark per point/development/example (maximum 3)</p>	(3 marks)
	<p>Knowledge and Understanding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The problem of evil and suffering suggests that there cannot be a powerful and loving God, and so seems to conflict with Christian belief. If the problem is solved by saying that God is more loving to allow evil and free will, this gives rise to important Christian beliefs about free will. If the problem is solved by saying that God is not all-powerful, this means that Christians have to revise their beliefs about God. If the problem is solved in other ways, such as evil being a test, this may help to strengthen a Christian's faith and help Christians to understand God more. <p>Accept any relevant point or justification (maximum 4)</p>	(6 marks)
	<p>Analysis and Evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explanations of evil and suffering, such as the doctrine of the Fall, have had a wider impact on Christianity. For example, belief in original sin being the start of evil have led to beliefs in the fallenness of humanity, and led to practices such as infant baptism in an effort to be saved from original sin. Belief in the Fall as an explanation for evil and suffering has also led some Christians to see women as inferior to men, because it was Eve who tempted Adam, and so caused the Fall, and hence suffering. If there were no such problem of evil and suffering, then there may have been a greater degree of gender equality in traditional Christianity. <p>Accept any relevant point or justification (maximum 2)</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not retaliate. Do not worry. Reconcile with others. Treat others as you would like to be treated. <p>Accept any relevant point, 1 mark per point/development/example (maximum 3)</p>	(3 marks)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jesus taught Christians to love others, no matter who they were. Jesus showed Christians that love is more important than law. Jesus taught and showed Christians that they should have faith, and if they do, that God will help them. <p>Accept any relevant point, 1 mark per point/development/example (maximum 3)</p>	(3 marks)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jesus performs miracles. Jesus claimed authority to forgive sins (which belongs to God). Jesus was resurrected from the dead, showing his power over death. <p>Accept any relevant point, 1 mark per point/development/example (maximum 3)</p>	(3 marks)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Soldiers gamble for Jesus' clothing. Jesus was mocked. The sky went dark. The curtain in the Temple tore in two. <p>Accept any relevant point, 1 mark per point/development/example (maximum 3)</p>	(3 marks)

Question Number	Answer / Mark Scheme		Number of Marks
	<p>Points and Justification For:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Gospels report that he performed miracles and healings (e.g. Luke 7). He appeared to have the authority to forgive sins (e.g. Mark 2). The Gospels claim that Jesus rose from the dead, and only God has power over death. At Jesus' baptism and the Transfiguration, God refers to Jesus as his son. <p>'And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."' (Matthew 13:16–17 NRSV)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> John 1 teaches that Jesus, the Word, is God – and many Christians believe that the Bible is true and so believe this. <p>'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and lived among us... Jesus Christ...' (John 1:1, 14, 17 NRSV)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is important for Christians to believe that Jesus is God, because this means that they should follow his teachings, and have been saved by him. Most Christian churches, such as the Catholic Church have taught this, and Christians should respect church authority. The doctrine of the incarnation explains how Jesus could be both God and human, which explains why did not always seem completely divine all the time. 	<p>Points and Justification Against:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Bible can be read to imply that Jesus was the Messiah, but was still human – many early Christians believed this, and Christadelphians believe this, so there is support for believing that Jesus was not God. Some scholars believe that the start of John 1 was not written by the same author, and that the passage about the Word being God is not particularly reliable – this is important, because if it is not reliable then Christians should not base their beliefs on it. Some Christians believe that Jesus being referred to as the 'Son of God' does not mean that he is God, but rather that he has a special relationship with God. As Jesus is generally referred to as the Son of God, rather than 'God' in the Gospels, this is important, as if the Gospel writers did not mean to imply that Jesus was God himself, then maybe Christians should not believe this. Jesus displayed clearly human characteristics, such as feeling hungry and suffering. God could not suffer. Jesus' moral teaching is still important even if he was not God, and if he was a human Messiah he may have still saved humanity, so Christians do not need to believe that Jesus was God to have a faith in God and practise their religion. The Jews never expected a divine Messiah, so maybe Christians have got this wrong. 	<p>(15 marks)</p> <p>Plus a possible 3 marks for spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG)</p>
	<p>Accept any relevant point or justification.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Salvation in Christianity means being saved from sin. Receiving salvation means that Christians do not have to fear death/punishment, and can have a relationship with God. Salvation is something which needs to be given or achieved – most Christians believe that they receive salvation because Jesus died for them, and they believe in him. <p>Accept any relevant point, 1 mark per point/development/example (maximum 3)</p>		<p>(3 marks)</p>
	<p>Knowledge and Understanding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Christians believe that Jesus' death made it possible for them to have a relationship with God. Christians believe that Jesus' crucifixion made it possible for anyone to have a relationship with God, not just Jews. Christians believe that they receive salvation because Jesus atoned for their sins. They believe that Jesus needed to make up for their sins because sin would condemn them to death and separation from God. 'For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.' (Romans 8:2 NRSV) Some Christians feel that they can only receive salvation through faith in Jesus, and so this is very important for them, so that they are saved. <p>Accept any relevant point or justification (maximum 4)</p>		<p>(6 marks)</p>

Question Number	Answer / Mark Scheme	Number of Marks
	<p>Analysis and Evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because Christians feel free from sin due to salvation through Jesus, this means that they feel freed from following the Jewish law. They worship Jesus and accept his sacrifice instead. This has put Christianity and Judaism on a very different path, as many Christians do not follow many Old Testament laws. Christianity has become both an inclusive and an evangelising religion because Christians believe that anyone can receive salvation through Jesus, and some believe that this is the only way that they can receive salvation. <p>Accept any relevant point or justification (maximum 2)</p>	
15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heaven Hell Purgatory <p>Accept any relevant point, 1 mark per point/development/example (maximum 3)</p>	(3 marks)
16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many Christians believe that after death good people will go to heaven and bad people will go to hell. Some Christians believe in the immortality of the soul – they believe that they will continue to exist after death and be judged immediately by God. Some Christians believe in resurrection of the body – they believe that their bodies will be resurrected at the end of time and judged by God then. <p>Accept any relevant point, 1 mark per point/development/example (maximum 3)</p>	(3 marks)