

ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY

1. Christianity began in the **first century** founded upon the teachings and ministry of a **Palestinian Jew named Jesus**. It arose within **Judaism** but soon separated from it as Jesus interpreted the Jewish law on the basis of himself being the **divine authority** and **fulfillment** of all its tenets.
1. Jesus was born around 4 BC in Bethlehem, Judea. He grew up however in Nazareth, Galilee. Jesus was a controversial figure. The circumstances surrounding his birth, life, death, resurrection, & claims of deity were all **scandalous** within his community. His most problematic teaching centered on the coming of the long-awaited **kingdom of God**. This teaching, in particular, led to government conspiracies to both arrest and kill him. The criminal accusations charged against Jesus were that he usurped God's authority and that he claimed to be king of the Jews. Around AD 30-33, Jesus was consequently sentenced to the capital punishment of Roman crucifixion on the grounds of **blasphemy & treason**. The followers of Jesus proclaimed that he was resurrected on the third day after death and appeared to them on several occasions. The later Christian community, known as **the church**, made the belief in Jesus' life, teachings, death, & resurrection the **central core of faith and practice**.
1. Christianity is comprised of 3 major groups: the **Roman Catholic Church** (over 600 million), the **Eastern Orthodox Church** (over 125 million), & the **Protestant Reformation** (over 300 million). Today Christianity has over **1.4B followers**; making it the largest religion on planet Earth.

BELIEF/PRACTICES OF CHRISTIANITY

1. Christianity purports that Creator-God is eternal, transcendent, immanent, self-sufficient, perfect, holy, just, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, immutable, & of aseity.
2. Within the one Being that is God, there exists 3 co-equal and co-eternal persons: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. This is the **doctrine of the Trinity**. This is one of several primary tenets that distinguishes Christianity from all other religions; and as far as Christians are concerned, any conscious rejection of this doctrine is heretical &/or cultic; for to reject **any** of God is to reject **all** of God. The most comprehensive way to understand the persons in God is in their relations to His work with humanity: the Father is **God for us**, the Son is **God with us**, the Holy Spirit is **God in us**. Yet all 3 Persons are the one God.
1. Humanity's first, original *religion* was established by God Who was known by the name **Yahweh** as revealed & explained in the Old Covenants (ie Old Testament). Some scholars, for the sake of classification only, refer to this as **Yahwehism**.

(The root of Judaism is Judah; only because Judah became the dominant tribe in Israel from which Christ came. Therefore Judaism can not be the world's first religion. The first ever religion known to humanity was Yahwehism; **the religion that glorifies the Creator as He revealed Himself to the first humans Adam & Eve.**) The tenets of Yahwehism include:

- A) God exists; and He is the Creator of all
 - B) creation is non-divine
 - C) Creator-God reveals through general revelation & special revelation
 - D) Creator-God is revealed as 'many in one' (1 divine essence/3 persons)
 - E) Creator-God created only humanity in His image & likeness
 - F) Humanity fell into sin & have thus remained unfaithful to Creator-God
 - G) Creator-God judges/curses humanity due to His holiness WHILE offers salvation due to His love/grace
 - H) Creator-God's means of salvation is through faith in His promises based on substitutionary atonement
 - I) Creator-God's salvation results in Him having a covenant people for Himself; ie Israel.
 - J) Creator-God's plan was progressive to add people from all nations to His initial people
- Though Christianity sprang from Judaism, it is essentially older than Judaism; because all of the tenets of Yahwehism (which is older than Judaism) are the exact tenets of Christianity. This then is another exclusive feature of Christianity: **Christianity is the continuation and completion of humanity's first, original religion.** (Gen 3:15).

1. Where as Judaism (200 BC) only embraces the Old Testament, Christianity completes and fulfills OT promises in the New Testament through the life, teachings, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. It therefore follows that Jesus would be the fulfillment of God's covenant promises since He was The God in flesh who made those promises. Thus the New Testament is not 'New' in the sense of being original. It is 'New' in the sense of the new life it brings as a result of fulfilling the old covenant.

1. People who believe by faith in the lordship, death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ receive salvation. Salvation encompasses:

A) forgiveness of sins

B) restored fellowship with God

C) The indwelling on the Holy Spirit

D) eternal life with God after death

Christians live lifestyles that bring God glory as revealed by the teachings of the Bible empowered by God's Holy Spirit. They are classified thus as the church; ie the spiritual body of Christ in the earth universally, locally, and individually.

1. Christianity teaches that those who reject the atoning work of Jesus will experience eternal punishment separated from God; those who receive the atoning work of Jesus by faith will receive eternal life with God.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO CRITICISMS OF CHRISTIANITY

1. Christianity is in constant contention with ethics because many people declare faith itself to be immoral; in that faith permits illogical, unreasonable belief and/or actions that possess the potential to injure us emotionally, mentally, and even physically.

Christianity does not teach having faith that is not grounded; that would be equivalent to fanaticism & sensationalism. That at times lends itself to cult-like tendencies. Faith is only immoral when we reduce & limit God to the boundaries of human understanding (which defeats the reality of God altogether); OR when we expand it without grounds on God's Word. To say that faith is immoral is to indirectly not believe in God altogether. On the other hand, faith is only true and valid when grounded in God's Word & exercised God's way. God gives faith and His Word grounds it. So then faith itself is not immoral, but our misuse of it can lead to immoral behavior. [Eph 2:8/Rom 10:17/Heb 11:1,6/Gal 5:6/Jam 2:17).

1. The doctrine of the Trinity portrays God as a god of the family. How can He be the god of the family while consciously and voluntarily sacrifice His own Son?
1. The Bible teaches that God is the god of justice. How can this God of justice consent to have His Son to suffer injustice after being declared innocent? How is He a God of justice in subjecting the innocent to suffering while the guilty go free?
1. If God is the god of life, why is the cross, the instrument of death, its emblem?

All of these issues highlighted in questions 2-4 are only issues when taken and isolated out of their larger context. Each issue is not an end, but a means of what God endured &/or permitted to express and demonstrate the depth of love. We must then consider: any expression of real love demands for the one expressing it to somehow turn against themselves for the sake of extending love to another. Simply put: love, in its purest form, is best expressed through sacrifice and self-denial of one's self for the good or benefit of another. In this: CHRISTIANITY OFFERS THE ULTIMATE SOLUTION TO ALL OF HUMANITY'S PROBLEMS IN THE GOLDEN RULE: LOVE YE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE ALSO LOVED YOU (Jn 13:34,35). Another version of that is: love your neighbor as yourself. As this principle is applied by all, it solves our spiritual, communal, social, and racial tensions and creates a society of people who love each other like God loves us all.