

A Study in Christian Apologetics – What We Believe & Why

Lesson Eight: Christianity is Unique

Cogito, Ergo Credo: I Think, Therefore I Believe!

Lesson Eight: Christianity is Unique Among Religions

Contrary to popular belief, Christianity is not about a 'list of things to do or to not do'.

What Christianity is about is a person: Jesus Christ.

Christianity is ALL ABOUT a relationship: Our life's focus is Christ alone.

Christianity is Unique Among Religions

Christianity is sometimes considered one of many religions. But it has one very special and unique feature-its 'direction'.

With all other 'religions', we find man attempting to bring about his own salvation either on this earth or in the afterlife. With Christianity, God is looking for us! It provides man with intrinsic worth and equality, yet we cannot achieve salvation on our own. In these respects, and others, Christianity is in a class all its own!

The 'Average' Religion

Tells you to be 'good enough' and either scares you, encourages you, or wants to sell you things to help you be 'good enough'.

Grace

A well-known mnemonic describing Grace is "God's Reconciliation at Christ's Expense." What does this mean? In short, grace means 'GIFT'. When we realize that it is our fallen nature to focus on ourselves instead of God, we find that God provides the means (gift of Grace) to bring us back to Him.

When we truly attempt to grasp the meaning of God's grace, it is quite humbling. No longer is God seen as the old tyrant looking for any reason to quash our fun or throw us into hell if we cross the line. Rather, He has done EVERYTHING HE CAN to bring us to Him, even paying the price of the penalty (death) for our sins, even though we never deserve it! Through Grace He has shown us the ultimate expression of love. Truly the Grace of God is one of the most significant themes of Christianity! And it is an absolutely unique feature of Christianity. Every other religion has us trying to earn our way in to God's grace.

"It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy." Romans 9:16

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God." Ephesians 2:8

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." Romans 5:1-2

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Faith

Faith that Jesus is the Christ is the definition of Christianity. But what is faith? Is it another word for 'belief?' No! The most common misunderstanding of faith is to simply translate it into meaning only 'belief.' But 'faith' goes far beyond just 'mere acceptance' of an ideal, or a creed. In short, it is LIVING TRUST. We have learned that we can never be as holy as God; therefore, we can never earn our position with Him. So how do we become reconciled? He provided the way, with Jesus acting as our mediator. Trusting Jesus as our mediator is the first step toward a 'LIVING' Faith.

What Does 'Born Again' Mean?

'Born Again' is used synonymously with 'Saved'. Or, perhaps someone refers to themselves as a 'Born Again Christian.' Both of these are correct when properly understood. The first time a person is born, he is born into this world with a body of flesh. The 'Born Again' experience that Jesus is talking about refers to the 'spiritual' birth of a person.

How does one know that they are 'Born Again'? The evidences of being 'Born Again' are the same evidences of being 'Christian.' The change in spirit presents a new focus; now we are no longer concerned with what makes ourselves happy, but with what makes God and Jesus our Lord happy.

...Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again." "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"
John 3:3-4

'Born Again' is an expression of the transformation a Christian experiences upon trusting Christ. Its evidences are seen in the changes in priorities, and in the process of Sanctification (spiritual maturity) in the Christian's life.

The Special Significance of Man

Christianity is quite unique in its description of the value of man. Christianity proclaims that God created us in His image. When we realize the importance of this gift of God, we realize the significance we have in His sight. We are indeed the crowning achievement of His creation. The fact that He entrusted to us a glimpse of Himself ensures every person's right to feel special, needed, loved, and to be treated as such. With God all of mankind is equal, and special.

With Christianity no particular person has a higher place with God than any other (except Christ). The image of God we have ensures our significance in His sight, and explains why He is reaching out to us, through Christ, to eliminate the effects of our turning away from Him and rejoin our appropriate place in communion with Him. It is only with Christianity that man has a purpose external to himself, and that all men and women are equal. Indeed, only in Christianity does man (or anything for that matter) have worth that is defined outside of themselves, equality in the sight of God, and purpose beyond self.

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The Unique Church of Jesus Christ

In short, the purpose of the Church of Jesus Christ is Ministry.

Ministry to God - Also known as worship. All believers (which means the Church) are directed to 'sing their praises to God', and to live for the 'praise of His glory'. This is perhaps the most obvious attribute to the world, when they see the believers gathering and singing praises, praying, and contributing to the ministry.

Ministry to Believers - The corporate body is also there for each other. In a healthy and growing Church body, there are many needs, and many gifts to meet these needs. From the nurturing of the new believer, to the exaltation of God's work in our lives, we help each other grow in the Spirit. We provide each other accountability, moral and financial support, and share in each other's griefs and joy.

Ministry to The World - The poet said, "He gave us a promise and He gave us a job - He'll be with us but the work is up to us." We are to take the unity and matured gifts we are nurturing within the Church and extend the love of Christ to the world, which is hurting and lost without Him. In effect, we are Christ to the world; when the non-believer sees us (our actions and love), they are seeing the actions and love of Christ.

Christian Maturity

As Christians, we know that Jesus is the Christ - the redeemer of our souls. He is the God-Man who endured to become the avenue for us to achieve holiness and worthiness in God's sight.

He is responsible for bringing us to fellowship with the Creator and Lover of our souls forever, according to His great plan. For this, we commit to worship and obey the commands of the Christ, because He has earned it!

"And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and was raised again." 2 Corinthians 5:15

Now, He asks us to prepare our lives for this eternal communion with Him while we are yet on this earth, both in a spiritual act of worship, and to point others toward the Kingdom of God.

"Therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship." Romans 12:1

"If you love me, you will obey what I command". John 14:15

"I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing." John 14:12

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

John 13:34-35

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Why Should a Person Investigate Christianity First?

Some feel that they should study the various religions to see which work for them. Christianity is open to this challenge. In fact, there are many reasons a seeker should consider Christianity first:

Christianity Is Evidential and Testable. Christianity is based upon solid historical fact. You can test the evidence for its reliability; you can begin to consider the validity of its claims. If you invalidate them, you can move on. The trouble with other 'religions', especially surreal worldviews such as Buddhism, Hinduism or New Age, is that you must either agree to accept incoherent postulates, or you must commit to a long process of discovery (since many - such as Buddhism - make claims that it takes a lifetime of devotion in order to finally realize what they're talking about!).

Christianity Is Unique with Grace. With Christianity, you don't have to buy anything! Salvation is free to those who believe! God has set forth impossible requirements for us to fulfill, but out of His love provides us with the means to accomplish it! Beware those who appear to be 'prophets for a profit'!

Christianity Is Livable and Fits Our Knowledge of the World - With Christianity you can be honest with yourself. With many of the other 'religions' you must live a 'lie'. Christianity allows for a complete lifestyle based upon the Creator's intentions, not what we seem to 'want' or 'hope'. With others you will proclaim one thing, then live another.

Jesus Christ - One very interesting aspect of many other 'religions' is that they include Jesus! Islam says He was definitely a major prophet from God, even higher than Abraham - just not higher than Muhammad. Judaism admits that He lived, just not as the Messiah they are looking for. Many adherents to Hinduism or Buddhism admit that He was a very special man, and had tremendous impact on the world and is to be learned from and admired. There seems to be a trend, and that is that all the major religions believe that He existed, and that He was a tremendous influence. So it is perfectly logical to begin with a study of the real Jesus - to see why all the others include Him and revere Him so well. A proper study of Christianity does just that.

In summary, if one is seeking for the Truth, and wants to begin a study of the world's 'religions' to determine which one fits our lives, our needs, and our world best, it makes perfect sense to begin with an open minded and in depth study of the Christian faith first!

Thinking Points

Two Minute Drill: Why is Christianity 'different' from the rest?

What does it mean 'to have a relationship with Jesus'?

What are the marks of maturity in a Christian believer?

What is the difference between obedience and legalism?

Two Minute Drill #2: Describe why a 'seeker' should investigate Christianity first.

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Lesson Summary

Christianity is unique in its 'direction' We

are saved by grace, through faith

Christian maturity is evidenced in obedience and love A

Christian will stand apart from the world

Conclusion: A Christian is free to obey out of thankfulness for Grace, instead of coerced to obey out of fear

Next Lesson: Comparisons to Other Worldviews

Resources:

[Reaching for the Invisible God](#); Phillip Yancey; Zondervan Publishing House; 2000

[Jesus Among Other Gods](#); Ravi Zacharias; W. Publishing Group; 2002 [Essential](#)

[Truths of the Christian Faith](#); R.C. Sproul; Tyndale House; 1998 [The Universe](#)

[Next Door](#); James Sire; Intervarsity Press; 2004 [Understanding the Times](#); David

Noebel; Harvest House Publishers; 2004

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