

Some Unique Features of Christianity

If Christianity is the true religion and all the others are false, Christianity must be different from them. Of course there are common items, or they could not be classified “religions”.

Christianity, Judaism and Islam all claim what Christians call the Old Testament (OT). Judaism filters that through the Mishnah and Talmud, then through more recent teachers. It is radically changed from the Judaism of Jesus’ time. The Orthodox, Conservative and Reform branches of Judaism are fundamentally different from each other. Islam claims the Qur’an corrected the Old and New Testaments (NT). Jesus taught God’s Word is perfect and about himself. Matt. 5:17&18 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

While Christians disagree about what is meant by various verses, they reject the idea that God is incompetent, unable to say what He wants and protect His truth. The basic teachings of the Faith are unchanged from the beginning of the record. The NT is in continuity with the OT. Jesus fulfilled God’s Covenant and Saved God’s People. While style and language vary, Christians recognize the same spirit and faith. Some groups disagreed with the standard beliefs but few lasted long or attracted many followers.

In ancient Jerusalem was a Temple building, priests, like those of other gods. However, the OT Temple’s sacrificial altar and courtyards were far larger. This God required far more sacrifices and was unusual, concerned about “sin”. The courts held two hundred thousand, a large proportion of the whole nation. To make them, on the east side was the highest, longest wall in the world. The west one is second. King Solomon sold off 50 towns to the King of Tyre for 20,000 men who worked for 7 years constructing them. This kind of story is repressed in histories of other peoples and religions. Ps. 122:4 That is where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, to praise the name of the LORD according to the statute given to Israel. There were very few who could read, no books. All knowledge, teaching was memorized, oral. This was God’s way of keeping His people together in His teachings.

Three times a year the Tribes gathered at the Temple to worship the God who kept Covenant with their ancestor Abraham and his descendants. The stories He had them record, were not like the stories of other religions. The God they worshipped was unique. He had no real name. He was called God Almighty, God of Abraham, but they did not speak His proper name Ex. 3:14 “I AM”. They said

“Lord”. The Hebrew consonants of “I AM” and the vowels of “Lord” in English spell Jehovah, usually printed “LORD” in Bibles. Inside the Holy of Holies there was no statue, only the throne for God, the “Mercy Seat”. “The Invisible” sat between cherubim, above the Ark of the Covenant, containing the tablets of the Ten Commandments. He was the only God with no name and no image! The only God with no beginning, no end - eternal - timeless, creator of time. The only God uncreated, creator of all. The only Holy Righteous God untouched by evil, causing no evil. The only “jealous” God, who forbid His worshippers from worshipping other gods. It was the only religion about sin and salvation. This God created people to love and to love Him. It was the only religion, where leaders regularly read God’s messages to the people, the sacred words we know as the Old Testament. The rituals and legends of other religions were nothing like that. This God continually had His covenant, His Word of judgement and salvation, taught to His people.

People all over have gods and worship them. They look for blessings in their daily lives. People want to get what they want and avoid troubles. They try to control the gods with prayers and offerings. They do not want gods to interfere in their lives. They feel it is god’s fault when evil happens. Some people who claim to be Christians have a “faith” like that. Jesus said on the day of Judgment, there will be people who claim Him as Lord that He will deny knowing, Matt. 7:23 and 25:41. People try to get god to do what they want. The real God arranges the affairs of life, this world, so His people will be Holy, Perfect, Righteous, what He wants, forever. He is Holy, Perfect, Righteous! We are not. That is what “sin” means. It is not being good or bad. Good people are imperfect, therefore “sinners” who need God to give them His Perfection, which they do not deserve and have not earned.

He is the only God who centers on Love. 1 John 4:16 “God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him”, and many more verses. The LORD, God, interferes with those He created, chose, saved, individuals and whole nations. “I am the LORD, your God” Ex. 20. Deut:6:5 “Love the Lord, your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your might.”. Lev. 10:18 “Love your neighbor as yourself”. Jesus agreed Matt. 22:36. He said “If you love me, obey my commandments.” John 14:15. When people do evil, He uses that for His judgment. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” Psalm 111:10 “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Mt 10:28

The covenant people were descendants of Abraham, but being a blood descendant did not keep one from being rejected, and being an outsider did not stop one from being included. It was the Faith of Abraham that counted: Genesis 15:6, Romans 4:3. Some OT verses seem to focus on the blood line yet the people saw Ethiopians and others in the Temple. Heroes of the faith included the Canaanite prostitute Rahab, the Moabite widow Ruth, the Ethiopian Queen of Sheba. He is creator God of every tribe and nation.

The OT tells the story of God's creation and redemption of His Chosen People, Israel. Moses leading the Exodus from slavery in Egypt, the Covenant at Mt. Sinai. God called them to represent Him to the rest of the world as a nation of priests. He began the establishment of His Kingly rule in the House of David of Bethlehem, but all were signs preparing, pointing to their fulfillment in the Messianic Kingly Priest. Jesus led all people out of the domination of death. Sacrifices of lambs can not "pay" for sin but the sacrifice of the eternal Son of God shattered the power of evil. His resurrection brings new birth, life, in the Spirit of Holiness. He leads His People to carry the Good News of Salvation to all nations until He returns on the Last Day, announcing perfect Justice, the eternal destiny for each person.

This is the only "Missionary" religion. The other gods were local, national, did not claim to be for all people. Only Islam, an offshoot of the Bible, and Buddhism spread. Buddhism is anti-religion. It teaches there is no god, no heaven, no hell. It spread to places where the local gods were worse than nothing.

The local gods affirm their people are wonderful and great. The gods bless them because they deserve it. The Bible is exactly opposite, telling how imperfect Israel was, the leaders full of error. Only because God was divinely loving, merciful and forgiving were they blessed. They were blessed in order to pass those blessings on. God called His Chosen People, mediators, His representatives, to a lost world.

This is the only religion where the holy books condemn their own religious leaders. In other religions the books were written by the leaders and support their position and power. Without leadership and organization nothing survives over the generations. Some kind of "organized religion" is necessary because of the weakness of our human nature. God called Aaron to be High Priest. Jesus called the 12 disciples and set them up to be the leaders after He left. God knows we need leaders and they lead imperfectly. Jesus was crucified by great religious leaders not by criminals. The Bible contains everything all people need for salvation. It is God's perfect Word to us. He had it written in such a style that we can only truly understand it by the illumination of the Holy Spirit and by paying attention to the witness of His Spirit working in His people of all times and places.

This religion is about what God does to save the imperfect at the cost of His own self sacrifice. 2 Cor. 5:15 "He died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them." Christianity centers in the cross of Jesus. His followers repent, surrender, are born again to a new life with the Spirit and power of God, transforming their mind, heart and soul unto eternal righteousness, holiness. They love and forgive as they have been forgiven and loved.

God's ways are not like our ways. God's truth sounds strange to human minds - a lot of scientific truth also sounds incomprehensible. He is not like a god we would think up. He makes us uncomfortable. He wants us to fear, love and obey perfectly, forever. The real God would be like that. In other religions how good you are, determines what you get, in this life and later. The powerful deserve it, the suffering deserve that. They are great for leaders and adequate for most when things are well. If they have existence after death, it is not about being with their god - no holy sainthood. They are what people would make up for themselves: everyone does what they want forever! Do you want to be forever where evil is enjoyed? Sounds like hell!

The real God is Holy, perfect. Only what is perfectly holy can remain in His presence. Imperfect people cannot be near Him any more than dark can exist near light. "This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." John 3:19 Come, ask Him to make you perfect, forever. It is His gift to all in His Son Jesus, God's perfect light for the World .

To God alone be Glory

He died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves,
but for him who died and was raised for them. 2 Cor. 5:15

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