

COMPARING CHRISTIANITY TO SECTS, CULTS AND OTHER WORLD RELIGIONS

CHRISTIANITY

SUPREME BEING - One God, who is Himself a Person. He is Creator & Lord of history. He eternally exists as the Trinity: Father, Son, & Holy Spirit. Gen. 1

KEY FIGURES IN HISTORY - Jesus the Christ, eternally one with God and incarnated supernaturally through the Virgin Mary. John 1:1-12; Matt. 1:18-25

PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST - One divine Person, eternal, with two natures- human & divine. Born on earth as a fully human being. Supreme example of Gods' character & His love for humanity. Full and final revelation of God and His love. John 1:1-13

WORK OF JESUS CHRIST - Jesus was born, lived, & died in a given time & place as a unique historical event. He lived a sinless life & willingly died on the cross as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity. He is Messiah (Christ), Lord and Savior. John 1:14-18, 3:16.

HOLY WRITINGS - Bible (Old & New Testaments). Unique, revealed, factual, accurate & inspired Word of God. Sole authority for faith and practice. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY - Humanity is part of creation & from God. Human beings are created in God's image. Every person is a unique, precious being of dignity & worth. Gen. 1:26-28

THE BASIC HUMAN PROBLEM - Sin: By their free will, human beings have chosen to sin against God, rejecting His nature & pursuing a course of life that is opposed to His essential character & revealed law. Gen 3: Rom. 3:23

SOLUTION TO THE BASIC HUMAN PROBLEM - Salvation-release from the guilt & power of sin-is God's gift of grace through Christ's atonement, received through personal faith in Christ. Eph. 2:8-9

ETHICS (VALUE SYSTEM) - Ultimate values for humanity are based on God's character and His Ten Commandments. Human beings are potentially good, but not inevitably good. They always need God's grace to renew their characters. Exodus 2; 2 Cor. 5:14-21

LIFE AFTER DEATH - Eternal communion with God in heaven or eternal separation from God in Hell. Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20:11-15

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JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

SUPREME BEING - One God, properly called Jehovah. His Holy Spirit is an impersonal force. Rejects the doctrine of the Trinity.

KEY FIGURES IN HISTORY - Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916)

PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST - A created being with stages of existence; 1. Archangel Michael or the Word. 2 Jesus, perfect man, became Messiah at his baptism; 3. After his spiritual resurrection, became Michael again but retains the name of Jesus.

WORK OF JESUS CHRIST - Christ's ransom sacrifice on a "stake" made salvation possible.

HOLY WRITINGS - Bible (*New World Translation of Holy Scriptures*) as interpreted by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY - Created in Jehovah's image; a soul, not immortal; capable of responding to Jehovah.

THE BASIC HUMAN PROBLEM - Sin: willful rebellion against Jehovah

SOLUTION TO THE BASIC HUMAN PROBLEM - Allegiance to Jehovah plus works (baptism, faithfulness in Kingdom Hall work; those ignorant of Jehovah given a chance to believe during the millennium).

ETHICS (VALUE SYSTEM) - Those not loyal to Jehovah are unrighteous; all earthly organizations controlled by Satan; Jehovah's Witnesses required to obey Jehovah's laws as explained by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

LIFE AFTER DEATH - 144,000 "elect" to reign with Christ in Kingdom of God (Heaven). Other Jehovah's Witnesses to live on glorified paradise earth. Annihilation for all who reject Jehovah.

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CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST of LATTER -DAY SAINTS (MORMONS)

SUPREME BEING - God, (Heavenly Father) is an exalted man with a physical body of flesh & bone. Was a man in preexistence.

KEY FIGURES IN HISTORY - Joseph Smith Jr. (1805-1844)

PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST - Jesus is the spiritual & physical offspring of God by procreation. Had a preexistence as God's spirit child and brother of Lucifer.

WORK OF JESUS CHRIST - His death guarantees immortality to all regardless of their faith, but one's exaltation must be completed by works. Suffered in Gethsemane for Adam's original sin.

HOLY WRITINGS - Bible (except for the "errors"); *The Book of Mormon; Doctrine & Covenants; Pearl of Great Price*; revelations of the Mormon prophets.

DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY - Preexistent spiritual offspring of God; basically good; gods in embryo.

THE BASIC HUMAN PROBLEM - Sin: Disobedience to God's laws. Adam's fall, in God's plan caused loss of immortality. Each person responsible for his or her own sin.

SOLUTION TO THE BASIC HUMAN PROBLEM - Exaltation or godhood through obedience to Mormon teachings: repentance, faith, baptism, endowments, celestial marriage, tithing. Baptism for the dead saves some non-Mormons.

ETHICS (VALUE SYSTEM) - People are to obey the laws of God; Mormons expected to observe the "Word of Wisdom" (rules for conduct).

LIFE AFTER DEATH - One of three kingdoms: 1. Celestial-renewed earth, where men become gods or angels; 2. Terrestrial-planet for righteous non-Mormons; 3. Telestial-planet for the wicked. Perdition is reserved for Satan and the most wicked.

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SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

SUPREME BEING - Same as historic Christianity

KEY FIGURES IN HISTORY - Ellen G. White, who possessed a modern “spirit of prophecy” (1827-1915)

PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST - Same as historic Christianity

WORK OF JESUS CHRIST - Lived a sinless life, died on the cross as atonement, & rose again. Entered “heavenly sanctuary” in 1844 to initiate ‘investigative judgment’ of those claiming to be Christians.

HOLY WRITINGS - The Bible as explained by White in her visions & interpreted in her books.

DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY - Same as historic Christianity

THE BASIC HUMAN PROBLEM - Sin: People willingly reject commandments of God such as the Ten Commandments, especially violation of eternal seventh-day Sabbath laws.

SOLUTION TO THE BASIC HUMAN PROBLEM - Repentance, faith in Christ as Savior, baptism by emersion, & keeping of commandments.

ETHICS (VALUE SYSTEM) - Christians expected to keep specific commandments of God, avoid unhealthy foods & lifestyles, & keep seventh-day Sabbath.

LIFE AFTER DEATH - Eternal communion in heaven for faithful remnant or annihilation for wicked (no eternal hell).

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JUDAISM

SUPREME BEING - One God who reveals Himself as Person. He is Creator, Deliverer, & Lord of history.

KEY FIGURES IN HISTORY - Abraham, Moses, David

PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST - An important prophet, but not a divine Person. He did good things and taught the Golden Rule.

WORK OF JESUS CHRIST - Judaism generally considers Jesus to be an itinerant Jewish teacher. His death has no saving effect. He is not the Messiah.

HOLY WRITINGS - Hebrew Bible (Tanach), including Torah, Prophets & Writings. Basically the Christian Old Testament.

DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY - Humanity is part of Creation, but distinct from the rest of creation and from God. Human Beings are created in the image of God and are free and self-determining.

THE BASIC HUMAN PROBLEM - Sin: Human rebellion & unfaithfulness to God's character and revealed law.

SOLUTION TO THE BASIC HUMAN PROBLEM - God grants salvation to people who repent, trust in God, and obey Him according to their understanding.

ETHICS (VALUE SYSTEM) - Ultimate values for humanity are based on God's character. The Ten Commandments, other laws of the Hebrew Bible, & teachings of the rabbis are moral guidelines for the Jewish community.

LIFE AFTER DEATH - Range of views * Reward or punishment in heaven or hell (orthodox) * Vagueness (conservative and reformed/reform) * Denial of afterlife (liberal).

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HINDUISM

SUPREME BEING - Impersonal Ultimate Reality; or General Polytheism; Major Triad: Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu.

KEY FIGURES IN HISTORY - Avatars (deities in human form). Gurus are spiritual teachers.

PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST - For some Hindus, Jesus was an Avatar or incarnation of God - one among many Avatars.

WORK OF JESUS CHRIST - Jesus was a great religious teacher whose teachings can be valuable today.

HOLY WRITINGS - Vedas, Upanishads, epics, Puranas.

DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY - Divine eternal soul part of God or Ultimate Reality. Physical body has little worth.

THE BASIC HUMAN PROBLEM - The human condition is samsara (the flow of reality in which souls are continually dying and being reborn). The present existence is an illusion; people are unaware of their oneness with God.

SOLUTION TO THE BASIC HUMAN PROBLEM - Goal of life is to gain release (liberation) from the cycle of reincarnation and to pass beyond illusion to become one with the divine (Ultimate Reality) by following the proper yoga (path or discipline).

ETHICS (VALUE SYSTEM) - Deeds are right if they produce good conditions; deeds are wrong if they produce harm to oneself or to the world in general.

LIFE AFTER DEATH - Cycles of reincarnation until union with or reabsorption into Ultimate Reality. The desired ultimate state of existence is Moksha ("final release").

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BUDDHISM

SUPREME BEING - Southern Buddhism: irrelevant - Northern Buddhism: Buddhahood.

KEY FIGURES IN HISTORY - Siddhartha Gautama (who became Buddha, the Enlightened One) 563-483 B.C.

PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST - A teacher who may possess Buddhahood or Enlightenment. One among many, not unique.

WORK OF JESUS CHRIST - Jesus was a great religious teacher whose teachings can be valuable today.

HOLY WRITINGS - Sutras; Tripitaka (the Three Baskets).

DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY - One lifetime for each person, composed of skanda (parts), but many lives for the parts. Concept of anatta (no self) denies existence of a self beyond mental and physical attributes.

THE BASIC HUMAN PROBLEM - The human condition is suffering, caused by attachments to things and the craving (desire) accompanying this attachment.

SOLUTION TO THE BASIC HUMAN PROBLEM - Salvation - the way to supreme happiness - is the elimination of attachments, particularly by following the Eight-fold Path.

ETHICS (VALUE SYSTEM) - The Eight-fold Path stresses moral virtue, including right action and right vocation. Right conduct includes loving-kindness, selfless giving to others & efforts to alleviate human hurts.

LIFE AFTER DEATH - Possible attainment of Nirvana (negation of suffering) , a state of being that is realized through eliminating desire.

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ISLAM

SUPREME BEING - God (Allah) is one. Strict monotheism - "There is no God but Allah".

KEY FIGURES IN HISTORY - The Prophet Muhammad (or Mohammed) (A.D. 570-632).

PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST - A major prophet, infallible, without sin, but not divine; His miracles are signs that He came from God.

WORK OF JESUS CHRIST - Jesus was sent to the children of Israel and faithfully showed the signs of Allah, taught prayer, and brought the Gospel (Injil). He did not die on a cross but Allah took Him into Heaven.

HOLY WRITINGS - Qur'an (Koran).

DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY - Created by Allah with the ability to follow his will, human beings must give account of their conduct on the day of judgment.

THE BASIC HUMAN PROBLEM - Sin: disobedience of responsible human beings to the law of Allah. Sin is caused by human weakness, forgetfulness, and a spirit of rebellion.

SOLUTION TO THE BASIC HUMAN PROBLEM - Allah (The Merciful One) acts in mercy. A person's salvation depends largely upon personal observance of the Pillars of the Faith and submission to Allah.

ETHICS (VALUE SYSTEM) - Allah judges human beings for their actions in submitting to Allah, obeying the Shari'ah (holy law), & advancing the Ummah (people of Islam).

LIFE AFTER DEATH - Paradise (heaven) for faithful believers and hell (punishment) for non-believers and those who commit shirk (apostasy).

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NEW AGE MOVEMENT

SUPREME BEING - God (Ultimate Reality) as an impersonal power, often spoken of as energy, consciousness, mind, or truth. God is everything; everything is God.

KEY FIGURES IN HISTORY - None

PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST - Jesus was one of many appearances of God throughout the ages, one of many people who were fully aware of their true divinity.

WORK OF JESUS CHRIST - Christ is separate from Jesus, the way-shower. Christ is the perfect God idea - the awareness of divinity within each person.

HOLY WRITINGS - There is no objective source of authority. Sacred writings and devotional material from many traditions have spiritual value.

DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY - Humanity is not distinct from God. Human beings are essentially divine; God is within each person. Everyone has the "Christ spirit"; everyone is potentially good.

THE BASIC HUMAN PROBLEM - Illusion, ignorance, or lack of perception. People are unaware of their true identity as divine, as one with God. They need to be "enlightened", to find ultimate spiritual knowledge and liberation from the cycle of reincarnation. Their primary need is for holism, to be integrated with the whole.

SOLUTION TO THE BASIC HUMAN PROBLEM - People overcome lack of perception by using techniques to change (transform) consciousness. They can attain enlightenment when they step outside ordinary modes of perception into altered states of consciousness that dispel illusory boundaries of individual existence.

ETHICS (VALUE SYSTEM) - No moral absolutes. Individual self-rule should be the norm as people follow their own intuition. Root causes of evil are selfish living habits.

LIFE AFTER DEATH - Souls are evolving toward union with God and will eventually find spiritual knowledge and liberation from the cycle of rebirth.

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CHURCH OF SCIENTOLOGY

SUPREME BEING - A Supreme Being, but his exact nature is determined by each person.

KEY FIGURES IN HISTORY - L. Ron Hubbard (1911-1986)

PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST - A great teacher who fully realized his personal divinity as a "clear".

WORK OF JESUS CHRIST - One Savior among many who teach people how to be "clear" of engrams (impressions of past experiences)

HOLY WRITINGS - Selected writings of Hubbard, particularly *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health*.

DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY - Each person is an immortal, divine soul, basically good, in three parts: soul (thetan), mind (the accumulation of all past experiences), & body (physical).

THE BASIC HUMAN PROBLEM - Engrams (learned behavior or conflicts from one's past, including previous lifetimes & prenatal experiences) prevent individuals from realizing their own divinity.

SOLUTION TO THE BASIC HUMAN PROBLEM - Dianetic counseling (auditing) leads a person to become "clear" of engrams, attain full human potential, & become fully aware of personal divinity.

ETHICS (VALUE SYSTEM) - Individuals must be able to put knowledge to use to help themselves & others. The final test: "Did the data and the use of it in life actually improve conditions or didn't it?"

LIFE AFTER DEATH - Reincarnation of soul (thetan) until it attains the state of spiritual awareness & liberation from matter, energy, space, and time.