



Nearly every people group in the world has a religious system. Many believe that religion was created as a way for people to explain the unexplainable or as a way to control the hearts and actions of people. It is also possible that there is something in the heart of mankind that longs for “something” beyond and direction by which to live purposely. In this module we will explore the frameworks of various religions and set the table in the next module to explain Jesus and Christianity within a contrasting context of other world religions.

## **THEOLOGICAL POINTS**

Every religion points to a problem and resolution between a deity/god and people. Predominant philosophies equally identify a “problem,” but without the centrality of a deity. This module works in conjunction with our previous modules on salvation where we objectively looked at Islam and the philosophies of Buddhism and Humanism. In this module we will consider the beliefs of Christianity in the same context in which we looked at other views. We will look at Christianity and its unique claims for:

1. Identification of the problem
2. Understanding of the solution and what must be done to satisfy
3. What the outcome the religious system or philosophical system promises

## DISCUSSION: CHRISTIANITY

Christianity is a unique movement built around the person of Jesus (Christ). Jesus was of physical descent Jewish, therefore the construct of Christian history is built on the same beliefs of Judaism. One unique difference between Christianity and every other world religion is that Jesus is believed to not only be a prophet for God, but God in person who took on flesh and lived amongst humanity. In doing so, Jesus “identified” with sinful people and was therefore able to stand not just with them as a teacher, but rather in their place bringing salvation through bearing the full punishment for their sins.

### **MY STORY | Starting Place**

What did you know or think of Jesus growing up? How about church, Christians, and organized religion?

### **DIGGING DEEPER | Practical Biblical Application**

#### **Identification of the problem**

Christianity claims that the problem with humanity is that, though we were created beautifully, humankind chose to rebel against God and go our own way. Due to this, Christianity claims that all people are, by nature and personal choice, rebellious (or sinful). In essence, we forgot who we were created for and lost our sense of purpose and “glory” in our creation.

Read Romans 3:10-18 and Romans 3:23.

What do you think of the Christian teaching that humankind was created sinless and perfect, but chose to go our own way? Explore some aspects of this teaching. What does it say about humanity? What does it say about the character and nature of God?

Many people strive to “be good” in their lives. Can our efforts to “be good” ever be good enough for salvation? Why or why not? What would you say to someone who legitimately tries to live a good life to earn their own salvation?

Discuss this notion that by nature and personal choice, we are rebellious (or sinful). Is that clarifying? Offensive? Other?

### **The solution and what must be done to satisfy**

Biblical Christianity teaches that, since humankind is sinful, even our best efforts cannot save us. Even if one were able to live perfectly, the fact that they are sinful would nullify those perfect efforts. The hope Christianity offers is that Jesus came in human flesh and lived a perfect life. Though He taught and healed people in his ministry, his ultimate purpose was to die in the place of humanity to satisfy the penalty for our rebellion. Christianity teaches that, since Jesus was God, His sacrifice was pure and because He lived a perfect life, he alone was able to pay the debt for our rebellion and wipe the slate clean.

Christianity claims that if one hears this truth, believes it in their heart, and invites Jesus to exchange their sinful life for his perfect one, that God will indeed do so. Salvation is a free gift to be received based on our confession of both our need for forgiveness and faith that Jesus has paid the debt we are unable to repay.

The idea of God coming to earth makes sense why Christmas (the birth of Jesus), the cross (the death of Jesus), and the resurrection (the victory of Jesus) are so important to Christians. How does that change with your understanding of Christianity’s claim of the real reason Jesus came? What aspect(s) of this have you or do you struggle with?

The free gift of salvation in Christianity seems too good to be true. How have you wrestled with the simplicity of saving faith? If it truly is “free”, why do you think so many people are opposed to this claim?

Understanding the centrality of Jesus in Christian teaching, how does it make you think about salvation in other religions or world views?

### **The outcome and fruit of faithful obedience**

Christianity teaches that once one accepts this free gift through confession and faith, that they are “reborn” into new life in Jesus. Spiritually, their old self dies and something new begins to grow and thrive within them. Specifically, God fills them with His Spirit, which instructs and enables them to live new lives (Ephesians 1:11-14). Within this, the rest of their life as a Christian should be an adventure of getting to know God and discovering all He has prepared for us to grow into.

Is the idea of God “instructing and enabling the Christian to live a new life” a new concept to you? Make a list of the various ramifications of this reality.

The teaching that God is literally working within Christians to live a new life is categorically different than any other religion. Other faiths believe one must strive and work in their own strength to earn God’s favor. How does this make Christianity different?

Upon physical death, Christianity teaches that the Christian enters into eternal life (heaven) with God forever.

Their old self has already died (Galatians 2:20) and the new life they have been experiencing continues forever, but perfectly without the bindings of our flesh and a sinful/fallen world.

Christian “heaven” differs from the afterlife of Islam (7 levels of heaven and a physical hell), Buddhism (the absence of life and suffering), and Humanism (we simply die). Contrast these different views.

Additionally, Islam teaches that Allah will choose where people go based on how they live, Buddhism teaches that you will either continue in the life of suffering or cease, and Humanism teaches that you simply die. Once again, Christianity differs because a person’s eternal fate is decided by faith, not by works. How a Christian lives is in response to the goodness of God, not to earn it.

Compare these options. What is so attractive to many of Muslims, Islam, and Humanism over Christianity?

In this teaching, “heaven” is a place to enjoy friendship with God (and his people) unhindered by sin and the decay it brings. Talk about what this reality will be like.

Is it loving for God to not invite everyone to this reality, but only those who responded to the gift Jesus provides?

### **Basic Outline of biblical Christian beliefs:**

- The life, death, resurrection of Jesus was a factual reality observed by over 500 witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:3-8)
- Salvation comes by confessing Jesus as Lord with our mouth, and believing this reality in our heart (Romans 10:9)
- The work of Jesus freed us from our sin; it is a free gift- (Romans 3:22-24; 2 Corinthians 5:21)
- The work of Jesus freed us from the bondage of striving in our own strength to earn God’s favor (Galatians 3:10-14)
- The work of Jesus reconnected us with God and saved us (Romans 5:10)
- When we surrender to Jesus we become a new creation and are sealed and empowered by the Holy Spirit to live a new life. (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 1:11-14)

## **GROWING TOGETHER | Spiritual Friendship**

How has this series of modules changed how you think about various faiths and Christianity?

What have you learned about the belief systems looked at?

How does this change your view of Jesus and Christian faith?

## **MOVING OUTWARD | Faith in Action**

Based on this series, how can you best engage friends with various beliefs in a respectful way?