

Introduction 1 Peter 3 :15 Able to give an answer
 There are 19 big religions, 4,300 smaller religions (approx.)
 UK is 15th least 'Religious' nation in World
 There are 45,000 Christian denominations worldwide (UK 290)

Is Christianity a religion? Depends on your definition.
 Latin-'religo' to tie, bind, from to tie to God.

If it is a set of beliefs and practices? Yes
 Has answers to ultimate questions? Yes,
 The word is used in the Bible, often quite negatively James 1:26-27 Acts 17:22
 If it is about our spiritual efforts to reach God, No.
 If it is about what we do? No.

Uniqueness of Christianity Most religions involve human effort.
 They require good deeds to progress e.g. Karma. We earn our progress.
 The Bible says we unable to reach God. John 3 :3 Colossians 2 :13 Grace, and a gift.
 Jesus did the work, not us. Ephesians 2 :8-9 2 Timothy 2 :12
 Not 'what' but 'whom' Jesus only founder who was God and rose again.
 John 8 :58, Only belief, where Founder died for our sin



Is Christianity the only way? All the other religions accept that access to Heaven (good eternity) is open to all people, only Christianity is exclusive.
 Why? Is being sincere/good intentions enough?
 If you believe in absolute truth, and the religions say different things, some things said must be false.
 Truth is exclusive. If we believed the Christian faith was just one good philosophy among many, then can accept other ways. However the core of our faith is Christ died for us.



Only one God Isaiah 45 :21
 Only one way - John 6 :40, 8 :24, 14 :6,

Can I be confident that Christianity is true? Can't other religions be true too?

1. Power to change lives, including yours!
2. Fulfilled prophecies. Isaiah 7 :14, Micah 5 :2 There are 48 OT Jesus prophecies fulfilled
3. Resurrection of the dead 1 Cor 15 :14 Only Jesus rose from the dead
4. The words of Jesus are authentic and supported by his miracles.
5. Historically and archeologically true.
6. Global influence, e.g. Morals, hospitals, World's largest faith 2.9 billion
7. Science. Isaiah 40 :22, Job 26 :7, Hebrews 11 :3
8. Honesty, it's hero's shown to be fallible.
9. The unique solution to our human issue, our sin.
10. The Bible. It is unique in it's circulation (between 5-7 billion), it's survival in an unaltered state, It's influence in law, ethics, culture



How do we avoid becoming a cult/ religion?

1. Focus on Christ, not leaders.
2. Avoid use of proof texts.
3. Live balanced lives, not obsessive.
4. Avoid inward looking.
5. Encourage people to think.
6. Focus on bearing fruit.
Matthew 7 :15-20
7. Ensure no 'special teachings' are given that are not Bible based.








Isn't saying 'only one way' intolerant? Tolerance is only a good virtue in some situations. A faith that says 'everyone goes to Heaven' would be seen as a 'good religion'. But if false, then it would be wrong to say it, just to please people. We are not claiming 'Christian teachings are the best,' but we are saying, our sin had to be paid for.
 If a doctor told you there was only one way to cure you, would anyone claim he was intolerant?



How do we handle people of different beliefs?

1. With love and respect.
2. Share your personal faith John 9 :25
3. Ask thought provoking questions.
4. Don't wage war over beliefs/doctrine.
5. Don't allow them to deliver their patter.



The main Religions	How do you get to the 'good bit'?	Other beliefs
Christianity	Repentance and faith, receive the grace of God	God became man in Jesus. God is knowable, loving and just.
Islam 	By submitting to Allah (Islam means submit) Shown by following the five pillars of Islam <i>'Those who believe and do good deeds...they will have gardens [Paradise] in which rivers flow.'</i> Surah 2:25	Follow the five pillars 1. Believe in God 2. Pray 5 times a day 3. Observe Ramadan 4. Give Zakat (2.5% to charity) 5. Hajj Allah loves those who do right. Mohammed was the last prophet to the World. Quran in Arabic so only Arab speakers can fully U.
Hinduism 	'Moksha' (release to a blissful nothingness with Brahman/god) You can reach this through many reincarnations and ridding oneself of bad karma.	There are millions of gods all manifestations of Brahman. Karma means consequences, cause and effect Soul reincarnates, going through many births until all karmas have been resolved All faiths lead to God
Buddhism 	People can one day reach 'Nirvana', a blissful spiritual existence. By following the 8 fold path people can build up good karma. The ultimate aim is to eliminate desire & become enlightened	Buddhism does not include God. The Buddha was not a god but a man who reached enlightenment The Eight Fold Path, includes Right Mindfulness, Right Speech etc 'The liberation of self is the responsibility of one's own self.'
Judaism 	Everyone will go to heaven, although there are punishments and rewards. Keeping the law pleases G-d. Jews have special role in the World	The Torah contains the Key instructions for life. The laws affect every area of life e.g. Food -Kosher and Kashrut Judaism is a family faith, you are a Jew if your mother is one. People can convert to Judaism, but not easy.
Sikhism 	Sikhs also believe in reincarnation and karma. We will go on being reborn until we are purified and can become 'one with God'. We need to become an absolute good human being.	The holy book, Guru Granth Sahib, is the 'living guru'. A committed Sikh wears the 5 K's, 1. Kesh (uncut hair) 2. Kanga (comb) 3. Kara (bracelet) 4. Kirpan (sword) 5. Kachera (shorts) All religions lead to God- Guru Nanak 'There is no Hindu/Sikh'
Pseudo-Christian Groups		
Jehovah Witnesses 	People need to believe in the sacrifice of Jesus, but good works like preaching should follow. Non Witnesses can be saved by serving God.	The top 144,000 witnesses will be in Heaven, the rest will live on Earth. A lot of emphasis on the 'kingdom of God' and end times. Non-Trinitarian.
Mormons  Church of Jesus Christ of Later Day Saints	Through both faith and works. There are 3 levels of heaven, only Mormons go to celestial Heaven. Only a few (v bad) people go to Hell	There is the Bible and Book of Mormon, both inspired by God Joseph Smith taught Jesus went to America after ascension, and that he had to restore 'true' Christianity. Non Trinitarian


Belief in our area

In the area around our church (Culcheth, Oakwood, Gorse Covert. Locking Stumps and Fearnhead)

56% call themselves Christian
36% say they have no religion
5% didn't answer
1% are Muslim
1% other religions

The most 'Christian' area in all of Warrington is Woolston which was 66%

In just our side of town Oakwood 48.7% and Gorse Covert 43.4% were the least nominal Christian.



Figures 2021 Census

Non Religious Worldviews

- Humanism**, is a Worldview that holds that the World is a natural place, with no supernatural side, and that science and reason is all we need. Humanists believe human beings have the right tools to enable them to work out for themselves what is the right or wrong thing to do. So, Humanists trust in Humanity.
- Political** Followers of a particular political philosophy, can have a belief system totally alters the way they view the World. Trust in a Party or 'System' to solve problems.
- Me and my pleasure** Some have no world view and are only concerned with themselves, and their own happiness. These people trust only in themselves.

Questions

How do we balance respect, without compromising our beliefs?

Next time - Priests and the priesthood