

World Religions & Cults 101

Bruce BICKEL
&
Stan JANTZ



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WORLD RELIGIONS AND CULTS 101

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Chapter 1

I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.

C.S. Lewis

A lot of people are calling themselves Christians these days—nearly two billion people, to be exact. Eighty-six percent of self-professing Christians are either Roman Catholic (50 percent), Protestants (21 percent), Orthodox (11 percent), or Anglican (4 percent). That leaves 14 percent—or nearly 300 million people—who call themselves Christians but aren't necessarily affiliated with a traditional church or group.

So how do you sort it all out? How do you finally define *Christian* and *Christianity*? One way is to modify the name *Christian* with the adjective *biblical*. That is to say, biblical Christianity takes its truth from the Bible as God's eternal Word.

Another term Christians sometimes use to further designate their beliefs is *Christ-follower*, because ultimately a biblical Christian follows the belief system named for its founder, Jesus Christ. That seems appropriate because, at its heart, Christianity is all about belief in Jesus.

Christianity: *All About Jesus*

What's Ahead

- Why Start with Christianity?
- God: You Can Take Him at His Word
- Jesus: The Answer to Our Problem
- Church: Why Bother?

Christianity has a lot in common with many of the other religions we're going to talk about in this book. Christianity features just one God, but so do Judaism and Islam. Christianity emphasizes the importance of relationships and the family, just like Mormonism. The Christian Bible talks about meditating. That sounds like Hinduism.

So what sets Christianity apart from all the other religions of the world? That's an easy answer. In fact, we can answer it in just one word: *Jesus*. Christianity may have some things in common with other religions, but there's one huge difference. Other religions may acknowledge that Jesus was a great teacher, a prophet, or one of many sons of God. But only Christianity holds Jesus up as *the* Son of God, equal to God in every way, who came to earth to save sinners and to give them eternal life.

Not only is Jesus the cornerstone of Christianity, but the person of Jesus Christ—His life, death, and resurrection—is also the

centerpiece of human history. In the 2000 years since Jesus walked the earth, no other person has had such an impact on the world. Nearly one-third of the six billion people living on the planet right now claim to follow the religion that bears His name. In this way Christianity is more than a religious system or a way of life. Christianity is all about a personal God who loved humanity so much that He sent His only Son, Jesus, to show us the way.

Why Start with Christianity?

As we begin this book on world religions and cults, you might be wondering if it's appropriate to start with Christianity. Aren't we being a little prejudiced, given our personal beliefs? Shouldn't we present all of the other religions before we get to Christianity so that you can make an objective evaluation without being influenced by our own bias?

We thought about doing it that way, but then Dr. Craig Hazen, our adviser for this book, convinced us to start with Christianity rather than finish with it. "It's the only religion that's testable," he said. "So you need to start with Christianity and measure all of the other religions against it rather than the other way around." Dr. Hazen explained that this feature of Christianity is unnerving to many because people generally conclude that religion is subjective. They think it's merely a personal experience that takes place inside you. What you believe really doesn't matter as long as you're sincere.

Well, that's fine if you're talking about the flavor of your favorite ice cream or the color of your socks. Your personal preference with regard to taste or fashion doesn't have a big effect on your future. But when it comes to your life and where you're going to spend eternity, what you believe needs to be rooted in objective truth rather than subjective opinion. How else will you know for sure that you believe the right thing? Dr. Hazen believes—and we agree—that Christianity is the one religion that can be tested objectively and found to be true.

Does this mean that all the other religions are entirely false? Not at all. As we said in the introduction, every religion contains some truth, but not every religion is true, and by that we mean *completely* true. The one exception is Christianity, which claims to be completely true because...

T rue spirituality cannot be abstracted from truth at one end, nor from the whole man and the whole culture at the other. If there is a true spirituality, it must encompass all. The Bible insists that truth is one—and it is almost the sole surviving system in our generation that does.

Francis Schaeffer

1. Christianity is completely true in what it says about God.

All religions and belief systems talk about God and the supernatural world in one way or another, but only Christianity presents God as He really is: the self-existent, eternal, personal Creator God who has revealed Himself to humankind. Why do we believe this is the true picture of God? Because that's what God has said about Himself. It's true because we can take God at His Word, as we will discover shortly.

2. Christianity is completely true to the way things really are.

What we mean by this is that Christianity gives reasonable explanations for the way things are in the natural world. First, the truths of Christianity are consistent with *history*. The Bible is filled with facts about real people and real events in real time in ways that can be verified. Second, the truths of Christianity are consistent with *science*. The Bible is not a scientific book, but the explanations it gives for how the universe got here are compatible with what science tells us is true. Finally, the truths of Christianity are consistent with *reason*. This means that rational beings (such as you) can objectively evaluate the Christian belief system and find that it is reasonable and noncontradictory in its approach to the human condition. The philosopher Francis Schaeffer wrote:

This does not mean that the Christian answer should be accepted for pragmatic reasons, but it does mean that the solution given in the Bible answers the problem of the universe and man, and nothing else does.

With that in mind, let's look a little closer at the God of Christianity, the person of Jesus, and the church founded in His name.

A Quick Look at Christianity

- Christianity is a religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.
- Following the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus in A.D. 30 in Jerusalem, the message of Jesus was carried throughout the known world by the disciples of Jesus, also called apostles.
- Because the first converts to this new belief system were Jews, Christianity was first viewed as a sect of Judaism.
- Gradually the new believers, instructed and encouraged by the apostle Paul, saw their faith as distinct from Judaism.
- The followers of Jesus were first called Christians in Antioch, Syria (present-day Turkey).
- The Romans destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70, effectively scattering Jews and Christians alike.
- Over the centuries Christianity has developed along three main lines: Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism.
- Today approximately 1.9 billion people practice some form of Christianity within these three groups.

God: You Can Take Him at His Word

The most powerful and pervasive idea in the world is the idea of God. Every person who has ever lived has thought about God (even the people who deny God exists think about Him). Yet God is more than an idea we humans came up with. God is a very real spirit Being who has always existed and will forever exist.

God Is Real

Different religions describe God as a force, a universal principle, or a superhuman cosmic grandfather who sits on a white throne

somewhere, disengaged from His lowly subjects. This is not the God of biblical Christianity. The God of the Bible is real. He has a personality with real characteristics:

- **God is self-existent.** Everything that exists has a cause, and the first cause of everything is God, who Himself has no cause. This is not double-talk or a contradiction in terms. Logic and reason dictate that for anything to exist, there must first be an uncaused, self-existent being. The Bible says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). In order for God to do that, He had to exist *before* the beginning.
- **God is eternal.** God is not defined or confined by time. He always was and He always will be (Psalm 90:2). God is also *infinite* in that He is above and beyond His finite creation.
- **God is holy.** God is perfect (the Bible term is *righteous*). In the negative context, He has no evil in Him; in the positive context, He is completely pure (Isaiah 6:3).
- **God is unchangeable.** Unlike the gods of other religions, God does not change. He is not capricious (that is, unpredictable). He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Malachi 3:6).
- **God is just.** We don’t have to worry that God won’t be fair with everyone. God doesn’t grade on the curve, and He doesn’t play favorites (Revelation 15:3).
- **God is omnipotent.** God is all-powerful. No person, nation, or confederation—whether earthly or from the supernatural world—can conquer Him. God is able to do anything that is consistent with His nature (Revelation 19:6).
- **God is omniscient.** God knows everything about everything. There’s nothing He doesn’t know, including the details of your life, both good and bad (Proverbs 5:21).
- **God is omnipresent.** God is everywhere, but He is not in everything. God is not the universe; He exists apart from His creation. Yet there is never a time when He is not near

to you (Psalm 139:7-12). This quality of God in which He is apart from and independent of anything or anyone else is called *transcendence*.

- **God is love.** God's holiness and His justice demand a penalty for imperfection, or sin. Yet God's love motivates Him to reach out to us even when we reject Him. The greatest demonstration of God's love was when He sent Jesus, His only Son, to earth to die for our sins (John 3:16).
- **God is personal.** God did not create the universe like a clock maker makes a clock. He didn't wind it up, only to let it wind down on its own. God is personally involved in His creation, holding it together with His power. And He is personally interested in your life. God knows you more intimately and more completely than you can imagine (Psalm 139:1-4).

God Has Spoken

The main reason we know that God is personal is that God has communicated personally with His creation. Although there is much about God that we cannot possibly understand, He has not hidden Himself from us. God has spoken—and by that we mean God has *revealed* Himself—to us in two distinct ways. Theologians refer to God's *general* and *special* revelation:

- **God's general revelation**—One of the most powerful and immediate ways God has spoken is through the universe itself. The intricate design and delicate balance of the universe is like a message from God that He exists and that He cares about us. The Bible says:

From the time the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky and all that God made. They can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse whatsoever for not knowing God (Romans 1:20).

As amazingly wonderful as His creation is and as much as it points to God's existence, we need more information. What does God expect of us? How do we get to know this personal God on a personal basis?

Can You Prove God Exists?

Because God is a spirit Being who exists apart from His creation, it's impossible to scientifically prove that God exists. In other words, you won't find God by looking into the heavens with a telescope. Yet God has given us plenty of evidence for His existence so that no one could ever say, "No one ever told me about God."

- The universal idea about God points to His existence. Why would every single person who ever lived think about the same thing unless it was already there?
- The notion that there must be a first cause for all other causes (something that science is now acknowledging) points to God.
- The universe didn't happen by itself, including the complex and intricate design that makes the universe work in the first place. Many leading scientists have concluded that there must have been an "intelligent designer" at work.
- And where did the basic human sense of right and wrong in every culture come from? Only a holy God could have planted this "moral code" deep inside of every human being.

None of these arguments prove God's existence like you can prove the law of gravity, but the weight of evidence points to God.

- ***God's special revelation***—God knew that His created beings were a curious bunch (after all, He made us that way), so He took another step beyond creation itself. God communicated to His created beings by giving them His Word. At first God spoke directly to people, and then He inspired 40 different writers over a period of 1600 years to record His personal message to humankind. Over time

How Do We Know The Bible Is God's Word?

Of all the holy books ever written, the Bible is the only one that says it was written by God Himself. How do we know for sure that this is true? The answer has to do with *canonicity* and *transmission*. *Canonicity* was the process scholars and church leaders used to recognize which books of the Bible were inspired by God. *Canon* is the word that describes the 66 books that make up the Bible (the word *canon* comes from the word *reed*, which was used as a measuring stick in ancient times). In order for a particular book to measure up to the standards of God's Word, it had to speak with the authority of God, be written by a prophet of God, have the authentic stamp of God, impact people with the power of God, and be accepted by the people of God. Every book in the Bible passed this test and was recognized as being divinely inspired by God.

Transmission describes the way the original sacred writings were brought from the original writers to present-day readers using the most practical and reliable methods possible. An important measurement of accuracy and reliability is the number of copies of ancient manuscripts that exist. In the original Greek (the language of the New Testament), more than 5000 manuscript portions of the New Testament have been preserved. In addition, there are many other historical documents written at the same time as the New Testament that confirm the claims of Scripture. Not every person, date, or fact in the Bible has been verified by outside sources, but many have, and not one has been shown to be false.

Then there's the astounding record of Bible prophecies. The Bible contains around 2500 prophecies. Of those, approximately 2000 have already been fulfilled to the letter with no errors (the remaining 500 concern events that have not yet occurred). The only explanation for this 100 percent accuracy rate is that God Himself made the predictions and then fulfilled them. There is no other possibility.

these written records were collected into a single book, which came to be known as the Bible.

The Bible is often called the Word of God for a very simple reason: That's what it is. The Bible isn't just some words *about* God. The Bible represents the very words of God Himself (Hebrews 1:1). The process God used to write the Bible is referred to as *inspiration*, which literally means to "breathe in." God breathed His words into the human writers through the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). If God does not (and cannot) lie, and if God wrote the Bible through the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit, then you can trust the Bible as being completely true (Psalm 33:4).

Because it was written by God and contains the message of God for all people for all time, the Bible is the ultimate spiritual authority for Christianity. But the Bible is not the ultimate way God communicated with people. God created people in His image so they could have a relationship with Him. But that relationship was broken when the human race rebelled against God (it's all written down in the first two chapters of Genesis). So what was God to do? How could the relationship between a holy God and sinful people be reestablished? God had to speak again in a more powerful and personal way.

Jesus: The Answer to Our Problem

After humankind rebelled against its Creator, God had a choice: He could either wipe out the human race, or He could offer to save it. The Bible says that God chose to save His rebellious creatures in a very specific way:

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

We have already said that Christianity is a religion built around the Person and work of Jesus Christ. In reality, Christianity is more than a *religion* about Jesus. More accurately, it's about a *relationship* with Jesus, whom God sent to earth to save humanity from

spiritual death. That is the heart and soul of Christianity. This is where Christianity stands apart from every other cult, religion, and spiritual belief in the world. A Christian is one who believes and accepts the claims of Jesus:

1. *Jesus claimed to be God in human form.* Jesus didn't say He was *like* a god. He said that He *was* God (John 10:30). The people around Jesus knew exactly what He meant. His enemies understood this claim, and they sought to kill Him for it (John 5:18). The followers of Jesus understood this claim as well, and they were willing to die for it. The apostle Paul wrote, "For in Christ the fullness of God lives in a human body" (Colossians 2:9). This "Jesus is God" premise is the foundation of Christianity.

2. *Jesus claimed to rise from the dead and claims to be alive today.* Anybody can claim to be God, and many people have. Some religions even propose that we can all become God. But where's the proof? A claim like that is ridiculous unless you can back it up. The same goes for Jesus. His claim to be God wouldn't have meant a thing unless He could prove it to the world, which is exactly what He did. While Jesus walked the earth, He offered several proofs for His divine nature: He performed incredible miracles that defied nature; He forgave sins, which only God can do; and He received the verbal endorsement from God the Father that Jesus was His Son (Matthew 3:16-17).

As important as these miraculous proofs were, they would have meant nothing if Jesus had not risen from the dead. The Bible says that Jesus died for our sins so that we could be made right with God (Romans 5:8-10). But without the resurrection, even the death of Jesus would have been pointless, and the faith of nearly two billion Christians living today wouldn't be worth a thing. The apostle Paul understood this when he wrote:

And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless, and you are still under condemnation for your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ have perished! And if we have hope in Christ only for this life, we are the most miserable people in the world (1 Corinthians 15:17-19).

Jesus the Messiah

Throughout the Old Testament, God promised the Jews that He would send a king who would establish God's kingdom on earth. This "deliverer" was referred to as the Messiah. He would be God coming down to earth. There were nearly a hundred prophecies about this Messiah, and they were very specific. Jesus claimed to be the long-awaited Messiah. He fulfilled each prediction to the letter and lived His life to prove that He was, in fact, who He claimed to be. Unfortunately, the religious Jewish leaders failed to see that Jesus came to build a spiritual kingdom, not a political one. They failed to understand the words of their own prophets proclaiming that the Messiah would come to die for their sins (see Isaiah 53), rather than deliver them from political oppression. The religious leaders opposed Jesus because He pointed out their hypocritical religiosity. He said that a relationship with God was a matter of the inner heart, rather than outward performance.

The good news for Christians is that Jesus Christ did indeed rise from the dead. The resurrection is a fact expressed in the Bible (1 Corinthians 15:12), and it's a fact of history as well. Of all the great spiritual leaders and teachers who have ever lived, not one ever rose from the dead, and not one ever claimed that he would come back from the dead. Only Jesus made this claim and then made it happen. And since this is true, Jesus is alive today preparing a place in heaven for those who believe in Him (John 14:1-2). Not only that, but Jesus told His followers that He would be coming back to earth again someday to take all believers to heaven (John 14:3-4).

3. Jesus invites His followers to enjoy a daily relationship with Him on earth. In addition to offering an eternal relationship with

God in heaven, Jesus made it possible for His followers to enjoy a moment-by-moment personal relationship with Him on earth. No other religion proposes this sort of amazing familiarity with the founder. Everyone who accepts God's offer of salvation through Jesus can be in intimate contact with God. The Bible teaches that this personal, ongoing relationship with God is made possible by the Holy Spirit, the third Person in the Godhead. Jesus told His followers that when He left the earth, He would ask God to send the Holy Spirit, "who leads into all truth" (John 14:17). The Holy Spirit dwells in the life of all Christians, reminding them about Jesus and guiding them into the truth of God's Word.

The *Mystery* of the *Three-in-One*

Christianity is unique among all religions in its belief in the Trinity, which describes the three-in-one nature of God. The word *Trinity* doesn't appear in the Bible, but it is an important part of who God is and a foundational doctrine of Christianity. *Trinity* does not mean there are three gods who exist together to make up one God. There is only one God, but within that unity are three eternal and coequal Persons: God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All share the same essence and substance, but each has a distinct existence.

God Has Spoken—Humanity Must Respond

God has spoken to people through His creation, through His written Word, and through the living Word, Jesus Christ (John 1:1). There's nothing more that God needs to do to reconnect with His created beings. There is, however, something people must do in order to make the connection with God complete: They must respond. Unlike some other religions, Christianity does not teach that all people will eventually go to heaven. Nor does Christianity teach that they can earn their salvation through good works. Christianity is unique among world religions in its belief that salvation is God's gift to humanity, and people can accept it only by faith in Jesus Christ, the only way to God (Ephesians 2:8-9; Romans 10:9-10).

Dr. Hazen Adds... A Confirming Miracle

The importance of the central miracle of Christianity, the physical resurrection of Jesus, simply cannot be minimized. It is nearly impossible to explain the rise and early success of the church without it. And the objective evidence is so strong in favor of this event that if we want to say it did not happen, we must first throw out everything we know about classical antiquity. This is because the evidence in favor of most other events of ancient history pales in comparison to the evidence for the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. It is the objective evidence for this confirming miracle that sets Christianity apart from the other religions in a dramatic way. Christianity is truly testable.

Each person who accepts the gift of salvation through Jesus then becomes a member of the spiritual body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13), commonly known as the church.

Church: Why Bother?

In a book called *Church: Why Bother?* Phillip Yancey asks the question, “Why are there so many more professing Christians than churchgoing Christians?” He goes on to describe how difficult it is to sort out the church’s human failings with the idealized concept of the church as the body of Christ. Many people share Yancey’s struggle. They know church is important, but they don’t like all of the disagreements and petty arguments that seem to divide one church from another. So they proudly call themselves Christians but stay away from church like the plague.

As we conclude this chapter, we will do our best to explain the purpose of the church and why it’s important to Christianity. We also want to give you a quick overview of the history of the church—and Christianity—from the first century to today.

What Is the Church?

Before there was the Baptist Church, the Church of Christ, the Little Church in the Pines, or the Holy Spirit Catholic Church, there was simply the *church*. Actually, there is still just one church, even with all the various branches, denominations, and sects you see in every part of the world.

Wayne Grudem defines the church as “the community of all true believers for all time.” Community is important to God. In effect, God exists in community through the Trinity, and God created us in His image to be in community first with Him and then with each other.

By Grudem’s definition, the church has always been around. It did not originate with Jesus. What Jesus did was to establish a new community of believers made up of Jews descended from Abraham and the old covenant (the old agreement God had with His people, the Jews) and Gentiles (that is, non-Jews) who had one thing in common: belief in Jesus Christ as the basis of the new covenant (God’s new agreement with all people).

The apostle Paul, whose dramatic conversion to Christianity turned him from the church’s greatest enemy into the world’s greatest missionary, described the church, otherwise known as the body of Christ, this way:

The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up only one body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into Christ’s body by one Spirit, and we have all received the same Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

Jesus Launches the Church

Paul and every other person who has ever committed his or her life to Jesus Christ by faith has been commissioned to be a missionary. Don’t just think of a missionary as someone who wears a pith helmet and lives in a jungle somewhere. All Christians have a mission given by Jesus Himself moments before He ascended into heaven:

But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).

Within 50 days of this commission, the Holy Spirit came upon the believers in power, just as Jesus had predicted, and the church we know today was born. From that point on, the apostles and believers went out to bring the message of Christianity to people everywhere. Despite the intense persecution of the early Christians by the Roman government (or perhaps, *because* of the persecution), the church grew as the Good News (the gospel) reached the ends of the earth.

The Church Grows and Then Splits

As the church grew, various *heresies* (erroneous views) threatened to undermine the truth about Jesus as the only way to God. Thanks to the work of men like Justin Martyr and Irenaeus

Peter the Rock

The Gospel of Matthew records a conversation between Jesus and the apostle Peter that has become the basis for the church (see Matthew 16:17-19). Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus then told Peter, “Now I say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church.” One interpretation of this remarkable pronouncement is that Jesus made Peter the founder and first pope of the church. More likely, Jesus was declaring that Peter’s pronouncement was to become the foundation upon which Christ would build His church. Indeed, Peter was the founder of the church in Jerusalem, where the Christian church began, but he never ruled the church with anything approaching papal authority.

(defenders of the faith known as *apologists*), the central truths of Christianity remained intact through the third century A.D. By the second century, the church founded by the apostles became the universal Catholic Church (headquartered in Rome), and in A.D. 312 the emperor Constantine, who converted to Christianity, put an end to all persecution of Christians.

Christianity became the dominant religion of the Roman Empire (that's what happens when the head guy converts), but eventually the church was divided into five regions: four in the East and Rome in the West. Because the Roman Church insisted on maintaining authority over Christians everywhere, a major split occurred in 1054 between the Roman Church and the four Eastern regions, creating the Roman Catholic Church in the West and the Orthodox Church in the East.

Dissension in the Ranks

While the Eastern Orthodox Church believed that the authority of the church needed to continue through “apostolic succession,” the Roman Catholic Church built its authority on the *papacy*. The Roman Church believed that the apostle Peter was the first pope, followed by an unbroken succession of popes, each one acting as a “vicar” (or substitute) for Christ on earth. Catholics believed and continue to believe that the pope is infallible when he speaks *ex cathedra* (with authority).

The Roman Catholic Church grew to such prominence that it dominated both the cultural and political life of Western Europe. Great cathedrals and universities were built by the Church from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries, but there was also great internal corruption and infighting.

By the fourteenth century, several prominent people were openly disagreeing with the Roman Church and calling for reform. John Wycliffe, an English reformer, boldly questioned papal authority, Church hierarchies, and other Catholic practices. He believed that the way to overcome what he perceived to be abusive authority was to make the Bible available to the people in their own language. Wycliffe was convinced that if people could read Scripture for themselves, they would understand how they could have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ without going

through the Church. He was the first to translate the Latin Bible into English.

The Crusades

One of the most controversial periods in the history of the church started in 1095, when Western European Christians launched a series of wars—known as the *Crusades*—to recapture Jerusalem and the Holy Land, then controlled by the Muslims. The Crusades lasted well into the thirteenth century and were eventually expanded to include any military effort against non-Christians.

Martin Luther Nails It

Initially the reformers didn't want to separate from the Roman Catholic Church. They simply wanted to reform it from within, primarily by changing the Church's teaching on salvation. The Catholic Church believed that "you get to Christ through the Church." By contrast, the reformers believed that "you get to the Church through Christ."

The reformers' strongest statement came in 1517, when a German professor of theology by the name of Martin Luther published his 95 theses (tradition holds that he nailed them to the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg). Among other things, Luther protested the Catholic practice of indulgences, which were like favors or pardons for sin granted by the Church in exchange for payment or good works. Luther believed that pardon for sin came through faith alone (*sola fide*). He also believed that the Bible alone (*sola scriptura*) is the source of final authority and truth.

Luther and his beliefs became the catalyst for the Reformation, which spread throughout Europe. Because the reformers were seen as protesting the teaching and practices of the Catholic Church, they eventually became known as Protestants. Over time *Protestantism* became a general term for a new set of traditions, which led to various churches—such as the Anglican Church in England, the Episcopal Church in America, and a host of Methodist, Baptist, Congregational, Presbyterian, Quaker, and Pentecostal churches and denominations.

What's That Again?

1. The one thing that sets Christianity apart from all the other cults, religions, and belief systems in the world is Jesus.
2. When comparing religions, it's important to start with Christianity because it's the only belief system that's testable.
3. Christianity is completely true in what it says about God and the supernatural world, and it's completely true to the way things are in the natural world.
4. The God of Christianity is a real spirit Being with personal characteristics.
5. The God of Christianity has spoken through His creation (general revelation) and His written Word (special revelation).
6. Christianity is all about a relationship with Jesus, who claimed and proved He was God in human form.
7. The church is defined as those who believe in God as revealed in the Scriptures and who unite to worship and serve Him.
8. Jesus commissioned the early believers to take the message of Christianity throughout the world.
9. The three main branches of Christianity are Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism.

Dig Deeper

Basic Christianity by John R.W. Stott is a classic book on just what the title implies. Dr. Stott has a way of explaining things clearly without watering them down.

On the other end of the understandability scale is Francis Schaeffer's *The God Who Is There*. You'll need your highlighter and thinking cap to plow through this great book, but it will be worth it.

Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem devotes five chapters to the nature, purpose, power, and government of the church.

We found our own *Knowing God 101* to be very helpful in tracking the major beliefs about God, the Bible, Jesus, and all of the other major Christian doctrines.



Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Do you think it's a good idea to start this book with Christianity? What are the advantages? What are the disadvantages?
2. From your general knowledge of world religions (and without looking ahead in the book), give a true statement from each of these popular religions and cults: Islam, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Hinduism.
3. What does it mean when we say Christianity is *completely* true? Give two examples.

4. In what ways has God communicated with His creation? What's the difference between general and special revelation? Can someone be saved by general revelation? Why or why not?
5. In what ways is the Bible unique among the holy books of the other world religions and cults? Why can you trust the Bible to be reliable?
6. Explain why the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the most important event of Christianity. How does this event separate Christianity from other religions and cults?
7. How has the church been able to survive from the first century to today?



Moving On . . .

Just as you can't define Christianity without Jesus Christ, you can't fully appreciate it without Judaism, the religion of God's chosen people, the Jews. Why? Because Jesus was a Jew, descended from the royal Jewish line of David, and because Jesus came to earth first as the Messiah to the Jews.

God hasn't forgotten His people, and neither should you. In the next chapter we'll explore Judaism, the world's first and oldest monotheistic religion.