

Active Christianity: An Introduction

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ABSTRACT

Active Christianity refers to a Christian who is totally committed and has given his/her life to Jesus Christ as his personal Lord and Saviour, and is Christ-like in character and behaviour. He must be a person committed to serve Jesus, follows his commandments, and win souls for him in order to de-populate the kingdom of hell (for he that wins souls for Christ is wise). He/she must live a life of holiness so as to be rapturable.

KEYWORDS: Christianity, Resurrection, Persecution, Judaism, Messiah, Jesus Christ, Redemptive work, Gentles, Rapture

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INTRODUCTION

Christianity is an Abrahamic monotheistic religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. Christianity is the world's largest and most widespread religion with roughly 2.38 billion followers or adherents and is the largest religion by population, representing one-third of the global population. The three largest groups of Christians are: the Catholic Church, Protestantism, and the Eastern Orthodox Church [1, 2]. Being a Christian is not just about going to church occasionally or simply believing in God, but according to the Bible, a Christian is someone whose behavior and heart reflects Jesus Christ. The followers of Jesus (i. e the disciples) were first called "Christians" in Antioch.

As a Christian, one must have faith and trust in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ through His death on the cross and resurrection by which our behavior mirrors, reflects and resembles.

HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY

Christianity began in the 1st Century after the birth of Jesus as a Judaic sect with Hellenistic influence, in the Roman province of Judea. Disciples of Jesus

spread their faith around the Eastern Mediterranean area, despite significant persecution. Inclusion of Gentles led Christianity to slowly separate from Judaism (2nd Century).

Emperor Constantine the Great decriminalized Christianity in the Roman Empire by the Edict of Milan (313 AD), later convening the Council of Nicaea (325 AD) where Early Christianity was consolidated into what would become the State church of the Roman Empire (380 AD). The Church Oriental Orthodox shared communion with the Roman Church before the Council of Chalcedon in 451 AD, and with the Church of the East until the Council of Ephesus in AD 431, separated primarily over differences in Christology [3], while the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church separated in the East-West Schism (1054 AD). Protestantism split into numerous denominations from the Catholic Church in the Reformation Era (16th Century). Following the Age of Discovery (15th - 17th Century), Christianity expanded throughout the world via missionary work, extensive trade and colonialism

[4]. Christianity played a major role in the development of Western Civilization, particularly in Europe from the late antiquity and the Middle Ages. The church for a long time has been a major source of social services like schooling and medical care; an inspiration for art, culture, philosophy, as well as politics and religion. Christianity also has helped to influence attitudes towards vice and virtue in diverse fields, and with contributions to the rise of scientific revolution, among others [5].

The six major branches of Christianity are [6]:

1. Roman Catholicism (1.3 billion people)
2. Protestantism (800 million people)
3. Eastern Orthodoxy (220 million people)
4. Oriental Orthodoxy (60 million people)
5. Restorationism (35 million people) and
6. Church of the East (600 thousand people).

Despite the split, there is the aim of promoting unity among the world's Christian Churches geared towards the vision of one, undivided Church, called ecumenism (or interdenominationalism, or transdenominationalism).

In the West, Christianity is the dominant religion even with a decline in adherence, with about 70% of that population identifying as Christians. Christianity is growing in Africa and Asia, the world's most populous continents, with a combined population of about 800 million Christians (in sub-Saharan Africa and the Asia-Pacific regions), roughly the same as the Americas. The comprehensive demographic study of more than 200 countries showed that there are 2.18 billion Christians of all ages around the world, representing nearly one third of the estimated 2010 global population of 6.9 billion [7]. Many Christians are greatly persecuted in many regions of the world, particularly in the Middle East, North Africa, East Asia, and South Asia [8, 9].

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY ALL ABOUT?

The followers of the Christian religion base their beliefs on the life, teachings and death of Jesus Christ. Christians believe in one God that created the heaven, the earth and the universe. The belief in one God originated with the Jewish religion. Christians believe that Jesus is the "Messiah" i.e. the savior of the world.

The five basic beliefs of Christianity are [10]:

1. The uniqueness of Jesus (Virgin birth).
2. One God (the trinity).
3. Necessity of the cross (Salvation).
4. Resurrection and second coming.
5. Inspiration of Scripture.

Christianity was founded by Jesus Christ who lived for about 2,000 years ago. The holy book of the

Christians (the Bible), narrates the life and the teachings of Jesus. The Christian faith started with a small group of adherents, which many historians regard as the spread and adoption of Christianity throughout the world as one of the most successful spiritual missions in human history. Most historians believe that Jesus was a real person that was born between 2 BC and 7 BC as recorded in the New Testament of the Christian Bible. Jesus was given birth to by a young Jewish virgin called Mary in Bethlehem in the West Bank, south of Jerusalem, as shown in Figure 1. The conception of Jesus was supernatural and was by the Holy Spirit. Not much is known about Jesus' childhood. The scriptures revealed that he grew up in Nazareth, but fled with his family to Egypt due to persecution by King Herod, and Joseph his earthly father was a carpenter.

He (Jesus) was raised as a Jewish, while most scholars said he aimed at reforming Judaism - not to create a new religion. At about 30 years of age, Jesus started his public ministry after being baptised by John the Baptist in River Jordan, as shown in Figure 2. Jesus traveled for about three years with the 12 appointed disciples (the 12 apostles), teaching large groups of people and performing miracles e.g. raising a dead man called Lazarus from the grave, curing the blind, walking on the sea among several others.

THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

Jesus' teachings involved the use of parables i.e. short stories with hidden messages in his teachings. Some of his teachings were centered on:

- Love God.
- Love your neighbour as yourself.
- Forgive others who have wronged you.
- Love your enemies.
- Ask God for forgiveness of your sins.
- Jesus is the Messiah and was given the authority to forgive others.
- Repentance of sins is essential.
- Don't be hypocritical.
- Don't judge others.
- The Kingdom of God is near. It's not the rich and powerful - but the weak and poor - who will inherit this kingdom.

Jesus Christ in one of his speeches, known as the "sermon on the mount," summarized many of his moral instructions for his followers.

HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION

It is believed that Jesus died between AD 30 and 33, although the exact date is debated among theologians. Jesus was arrested, tried and condemned to death by Pontius Pilate the Roman governor who ordered his killing after being pressured by the Jewish leaders, who alleged that Jesus was guilty of varieties of

crimes, including blasphemy. The Roman soldiers crucified Jesus in Jerusalem and his body was buried in a tomb. Three days after his crucifixion, according to the scriptures, his body was missing. After his death, it was reported by some people of sighting and encountering him after he resurrected, and thereafter he ascended into heaven, as shown in Figure 3.

THE CHRISTIAN BIBLE

The Christian Bible is a collection of 66 books written by various authors. The book is divided into two parts i.e. the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT). The OT is about the history of the Jewish people, outlines specific laws to follow, details the lives of many prophets, and predicts the coming of the Messiah. While the NT was written after the death of Jesus and which consists of four books i.e. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, which are known as the "Gospels" meaning "good news". These books were written between AD 70 and AD 100, provided accounts of the life and death of Jesus.

WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

Jesus Christ is the Beloved Son of the Almighty God who was sent to this evil or wicked world to show the light of life to men and shed his blood for the redemption of sinful mankind, as shown in Figure 4. The word of God as recorded in John 3:16-19 says:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God sent not his Son to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

Jesus is the Son of God, though some people say or argue that God has no son, because He (God) is not married. God the 'father' is the giver of 'life' and it is in this reasoning and line that Jesus Christ is the Son of God because he received life from Him, as quoted from John 5:26, which says: "For as the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given the Son to have life in himself." Consequent upon this, God is also the Father of other angels in heaven as well as of human beings on earth because "He giveth to all life and breath" as in Acts 17:24-28. Paul the Apostle in Hebrews 1:1-9 mentioned that the Sonship of Jesus Christ is in an exclusive category and is matchless, said: ".....when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.... For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I

will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son...." Jesus Christ is God as [11]:

1. He was pre-existent with the Father. "The same was in the beginning with God. All things were by him: and without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:2, 3; 17:3 and Colossians 1:17)
2. He is the Son of God.
 - Jesus' enemies admitted "He.....said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God" - John 5:18.
 - Peter said "And we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"- John 6:69.
 - Jesus himself affirmed "I and my Father are one" - John 10:30.
3. He was sinless, as only God can be.
 - Jesus challenged His enemies "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" - John 8:46.
 - "...Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" as stated by Peter in 1 Peter 2:21, 22.
 - Paul stated "For he...made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" - 2 Corinthians 5:21.
4. He forgives sin, as only God can.
 - the Scribes in their reasoning said "Who can forgive sins but God only? as recorded in Mark 2:7.
 - Jesus said "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins..." Matthew 9:6, John 8:11.
 - Peter mentioned that "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness by whose stripes ye were healed" - 1 Peter 2:24.
5. He (Jesus) performed miraculous works.
 - He healed the sick - Matthew 8:9-12, Luke 4:31-44; 5:12-15 etc.
 - He fed the hungry - John 6: Mark 8, etc.
 - He raised the dead - Luke 7:11-18; John 11:1-46.
 - Jesus Christ became man - this was as stated in John 1:14 and Philippians 2:7, 8 "And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us...full of grace and truth."

- His birth was miraculous and was prophesied 800 years before His coming: "...Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel" - Isaiah 7:14.
- This prophecy came to fulfillment as in Luke 1:30, 31 "fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS."
- Jesus showed human characteristics such as being tired (John 4:6), he thirsted (John 19:28), he eat food (Luke 24:40-43), he showed emotions/feelings (Mark 6:34), he wept (John 11:35), he passed through/suffered temptation (Hebrews 4:15), and died (John 19:30).

The works of His Father was accomplished:

1. Jesus Christ died on the cross, which is the basic theme of the Gospels.
 - the fact of His death, for it was for this purpose He came into the world (John 12:27); His death was prophesied hundreds of years before He came (Isaiah 53: 3-8).
 - His death meant a ransom for sin (Matthew 20:28; Romans 3: 24). It was to pay the penalty for sin (Romans 3:24; 1 John 2:2, 4:10) - because man is the object of God's wrath due to rebellion and sin, hence He sent His own Son to Calvary. It was also for reconciliation i.e. to put an end to the enmity between man and God (Romans 5:10) and restore us to God. This was for substitution as He died in our place (1 Peter 3:18, 2 Corinthians 5:21).
 - Jesus resurrected from the dead, which is unique and fundamental to Christianity. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was a reality (John 20:1-20), it was credible as it was predicted by Jesus himself (Matthew 13:39-41, Luke 24:1-7), the tomb was empty (John 20: 11-13), many witnesses saw him alive e.g. the women, Mary Magdalene, Peter and other disciples.

The outcome/results of His work:

- Jesus Christ ascended to His Father (Acts 16:11)
- He is our eternal mediator (1 Timothy 2:5, Hebrews 8:6)
- He is our Saviour (Matthew 1:21) and there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12, Hebrews 7:25); He is a personal saviour (Romans 10:9-10).

The consummation of His work:

- He shall return again to this earth (Acts 1:11, Hebrews 10:37).

- The believers in Christ shall be bodily resurrected to begin a new, undying life (1 Thessalonians 4:17-18, 1 Corinthians 15:51-58).
- Jesus will reign as King of kings and Lord of lords over His new creation (1 Peter 3:10, Revelation 22:3-5).

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN ACTIVE/GOOD CHRISTIAN

An active Christian should be God-fearing and humble. Active Christians should display the fruits of the Spirit as enumerated in Galatians 6 which are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control. Inasmuch as none can possess all these qualities perfectly well, we must and should continually strive to grow in them as a result of the Spirit's work in us. An effective Christian too must have an active prayer life, by which we can walk with and be in tune with God, as well as reading/meditating in the word of God/Bible, serve the Lord, rejoice in hope, be hospitable, overcome evil with good, meekness, integrity, etc [12, 13, 14].

CONCLUSION

Believers or active Christians should forsake their sins and sincerely make a u-turn to Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, desire to live uprightly, have a mind-set of humility, be compassionate, seek peace in their relationships with others, and be willing to suffer persecutions as Jesus did and as true followers/disciples, with the ultimate hope of reigning with him. As an active Christian, one must acknowledge himself/herself as a sinner (1 Timothy 1: 15; 1 John 1: 8-9), repent and be converted (Acts 3:19; John 3: 1-18; Isaiah 55: 6,7; Ezekiel 18: 30-32), become a new creature (in Christ Jesus) – (2 Corinthians 5: 17), receive Jesus as your personal saviour (John 1: 10-14), and deny ungodliness and worldly lusts (Titus 2: 11-14).

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Figure 1. Birth of Jesus Christ.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Date_of_birth_of_Jesus



Figure 2. Jesus Baptism Site.

Source: https://uploaded.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/ce/Jesus_baptism_site_-_River_Jordan_015.jpg



Figure 3. The Ascension of Jesus Christ

Source: <https://www.rapidcitydiocese.org/ascension/>



Figure 4. Jesus Christ.
Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus>