

Celestial Grace Temple

What is Christianity ?

Christianity is a religion based upon the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, who lived in Palestine during the first century.

However, if Christianity is lived as merely a set of teachings and rules to be followed, it misses the main points that Jesus taught. First and foremost, Christianity is anchored in love—God's love for us and our response to that love.

Christianity was derived from Judaism. Under Judaism, the Hebrew Old Testament writings formed the basis of a covenant between God (Yahweh) and the people of Israel.

According to the prophecies found in those writings, God was going to send the Messiah (anointed One), who would bless not only the Israelites, but all the peoples of the world.

The prophecies set out not only the nature of the Messiah, but pinpointed His place and date of birth, along with dozens of other specific characteristics. Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled these prophecies in exquisite detail. Jesus' purpose was two-fold.

First, according to both Old and New Testament writings, Jesus was God, who took on human form to teach us about Himself and His path to salvation (eternal life). Second, Jesus was to provide the ultimate sacrifice (death on a Roman cross) for sins (the bad things we do), so that we could be with Him forever in heaven.

To prove that He was God and that the sacrifice was efficacious, Jesus rose from the dead. So, according to Christianity, Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah—the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and God of all.

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Teachings of Jesus

Although Jesus did not teach anything radically different from that of the Old Testament, He simplified the main points so that people could not escape into a pure exercise of religious ceremonies.

The Old Testament describes many laws (both moral and ceremonial) that were to be followed by the people of God. With so many laws, people tended to become selective, preferring to follow the easier ceremonial laws over the more difficult moral laws (Matthew 23:23).

1: The religious ruling class was especially susceptible to selective obedience of the law, resulting in moral hypocrisy. Jesus explained that the moral commandments were not to be followed merely to the letter of the law, but also to the intent of the law.

So, it was not enough to abstain from adultery, but God required that one not even look on a woman with lust (Matthew 5:27-28).

2: Likewise, it is not enough to abstain from murder, but God requires that nobody hate another without cause, with calling another person "a fool" making one guilty enough to suffer the judgment of Hell (Matthew 5:21-22).

3: So God's laws require not only perfect performance, but also perfect attitude and motive.

Jesus said the entire law of God could be summarized into a mere two commands:

Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment.

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And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:37-40)

So, the fundamental principle that defines the Christian experience is love—love of God and love of our fellow human beings. So, a person who merely loves his fellow man is only fulfilling half of the law, and is neglecting what Jesus said was the most important part—loving God.

Salvation

Since God's standard for behavior is perfection in thought and deed, we are going to find it very difficult to meet God's standard. However, since God loves us so much, He has provided another means by which we can attain perfection.

Jesus, as God, took on the form of a human being and lived on the earth in the first century.

4: Besides teaching, His main purpose was to provide the ultimate sacrifice for sins, by living a completely sinless life.

5: Dying on a cross.

6: Rising from the dead.

7: It is through belief in Jesus and His sacrifice for sins that one is declared righteous and free from sin.

8: One who believes in Jesus follows Him.

9: Being indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who guides Christians as they become conformed to the image of Christ.

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10: Sanctification.

Sanctification is a fancy theological term that describes the process by which a Christian becomes more and more like Jesus. Perfection is not possible in this world, but God wants us to love Him and our fellow human beings more (Matthew 22:37-40).

So, a Christian's life is not over once he/she makes a commitment to Jesus. To be a fulfilled Christian, a follower of Jesus is to study the Bible, the source of God's word to His people. In addition, Christians are to attend a fellowship of other believers on a regular basis for instruction, fellowship, worship, and service.

11: God has prepared ahead of time a lifetime of good works that we should do (Ephesians 2:10).

12: This fulfills both great commandments—love of God and love of our fellow human beings.

Christianity is more than a religion. Christianity is a way of life based upon one's love of God and love of people. Christianity is also a commitment to personal integrity and truth.

May the grace of God be with you always --- Amen.

Pastor Andy Anderson

Celestial Grace Ministry